CHAPTER ONE

General Question Raised by Mr. Courbet's Essays – Contradiction of Schools; Need for a Solution

GUSTAVE COURBET, the artist of violent paradoxes, has just produced a work whose scandal would have erased all those he has been guilty of over the past fifteen years, if the government had not taken care to put things right by purely and simply excluding this reckless painting from the 1863 exhibition. By superior order, The Return from the Conference was neither admitted nor excluded at the Palais de l'Industrie. On this occasion, the author's opponents did not fail to exclaim that this petty persecution was precisely what he was seeking. "Courbet," they say, "is at his last straw. After having annoyed the public with his sophisticated ugliness, now he resorts to the impropriety of his subjects." By dint of cynicism, he was bound to attract a coup d'état: the only way left to him to keep quiet about himself once again. Now, let the foreigners to whom he is going to peddle his masterpiece show him their indiscreet curiosity in florins, guineas, and dollars, that's all he asks. Let them know only that this so-called master painter, the equivocal founder of a school without students, who never knew how to formulate his principles, this insulter of art, is on trial; he has nothing more to show the onlookers; he has run out of surprises and charlatanism... " And the public, who understands nothing of these artists' disputes, opens its eyes wide, a mediocre connoisseur of painting, but very hungry for scandal.

Imagine, on a highway, at the foot of a blessed oak, in front of a holy image, under the sardonic gaze of the modern peasant, a scene of drunkards all belonging to the most respectable class of society, the priesthood: there, sacrilege joining drunkenness, blasphemy falling upon sacrilege; the seven deadly sins, hypocrisy at the head, parading in costume.

ecclesiastical; a libidinous vapor circulating through the groups; finally, by a final and vigorous contrast, this little orgy of clerical life taking place in the heart of a landscape both charming and grandiose, as if man, in his highest dignity, existed only to sully innocent nature with his indelible corruption: this, in a few lines, is what Courbet took it upon himself to depict. Even if he had been content, to express his verve, with a few square feet of canvas! But no, he built an immense machine, a vast composition, as if it had been Christ on Calvary, Alexander the Great entering Babylon, or the Tennis Court Oath.

So, when this pictorial joy appeared before the jury, there was an outcry; the authorities decided to exclude him. But Courbet recriminates: more than ever he accuses his colleagues, en masse, of ignoring the innermost thought and the lofty mission of art, of depraving it, of prostituting it with their idealism; and it must be admitted that the decadence now noted by all art lovers and critics is not a little calculated to give the outlawed artist at least an appearance of reason. Who is wrong, the so-called realist Courbet, or his detractors, champions of the ideal? Who will judge this trial, where art itself, with all that constitutes it and depends on it, is called into question?

I have no intention here of acting as a champion or guarantor of Mr. Courbet's fantasies. That he be valued at his true worth, in accordance with the principles and rules of art, is all I wish for this artist, and I gladly leave that to the public. But it still needs to be understood, especially for its antagonists to understand themselves. What is this ART, which everyone cultivates with more or less splendor? What is its principle, what is its purpose, what are its rules? Strangely enough, there is no one, neither at the Academy nor elsewhere, who is perhaps in a position to say. Art is something indefinable, something mystical, poetry, fantasy, whatever you like, which escapes analysis, exists only for itself, and knows no rules. Collect the speeches, gather the writings, sift through the criticism: I am greatly deceived if you obtain nothing more. This does not prevent artists from arguing with each other no more and no less than theologians and lawyers, who, at least, recognize principles and rules, and from condemning each other, as if it were not a given that they cannot agree. Do not ask what the utility of art is and what role artists play in society. There are professors who

would tell you that the essential character of art, its glory, is precisely to be free from any utilitarian, servile condition. Art is free, they say; it does what it pleases, works for...

his pleasure, and no one has the right to say to him: Let's see your product. What then! Plato expelled poets and artists from the republic; Rousseau accused them of the corruption of morals and the decadence of states. Should we believe, according to these illustrious philosophers, great writers themselves, great artists, that art, being reverie, whim, and laziness, can engender nothing good? I confess that it disgusts me to admit such a conclusion, and, willingly or not, since art is obviously a faculty of the human mind, I wonder what is the function or functioning of this faculty, and consequently, what is its domestic and social purpose. Whether Mr. Courbet puts priests on a spree in his paintings, or whether Mr. Flandrin depicts them at mass; Let us see peasants, soldiers, horses, trees in paintings, when it is up to us to observe them in nature; let us be shown, which is much more powerful, in all sorts of poses, the supposed effigies sometimes of ancient figures about whom we know almost nothing, sometimes of heroes of novels, fairies, angels, gods, products of fantasy and superstition, how can all this seriously interest us? What does it matter to our economy, our government, our morals? What does it add to our well-being, to our improvement? Is it appropriate for serious minds to concern themselves with such costly trifles? Do we have any spare time and money?... This, of course, is what we practical and sensible people, who are not initiated into the mysteries of art, have the right to ask artists, not to contradict them, but in order to be edified about what they think of themselves and what they expect of us. Now, this is precisely what, since these gentlemen have been quarreling, genus irritabile, no one seems to have clearly answered.

Every two years, formerly it was every year, the government treats the public to a major exhibition of painting, statuary, drawing, etc. Never has industry had such frequent exhibitions, and it has enjoyed them for much less time. In fact, it is an artists' fair, putting their products on sale and anxiously awaiting customers. For these exceptional solemnities, the government appoints a jury to verify the works sent to it and to select the best. Based on the jury's report, the government awards gold and silver medals, decorations, honorable mentions, monetary rewards, and pensions; for

distinguished artists, according to recognized talent and age, there are positions in Rome, at the Academy, and in the Senate. All these expenses are paid by us laypeople, like those of the army and local roads: which establishes an analogy of...

no longer between industrialists and artists. However, no one, neither on the jury, nor at the Academy, nor in the Senate, nor in Rome, would perhaps be able to justify this budget item with an intelligible definition of art and its function, whether in families, in the city, or in power. Why not leave artists to their own devices and concern themselves with them no more than with entertainers and tightrope walkers? Perhaps this would be the best way to know exactly what they are and what they are worth.

The more one reflects on this question of art and artists, the more one encounters causes for astonishment. Mr. Ingres, a master painter like Mr. Courbet, has become rich and famous through the sale of his works. It is clear that this one, at least, has not worked solely for the sake of fantasy. Very recently, he was admitted to the Senate as one of the country's great notables; At the signal given by the government, the citizens of Montauban, compatriots of M. Ingres, awarded him a golden crown. So painting is placed on a par with war, religion, science, and industry. But why was M. Ingres, currently a senator, considered first among equals? If you consult the experts, men of letters, artists, and critics, on the artistic merit of M. Ingres, most, if not all, will naively answer that M. Ingres, a skilled draughtsman, is the much-discussed leader of a school that has fallen into disrepute for more than thirty years, the classical school; that this school was succeeded by another which, in turn, achieved vogue, the romantic school, whose leader, M. Eugène Delacroix, has just died; that the latter itself has succumbed, and that it has been partly replaced by the realist school, which has been no better able to define itself than its predecessors, and whose principal representative is M. COURBET. So that, upon the glory of M. Ingres, venerable leader of classicism, two younger schools have been superimposed, two new generations of artists, just as two or even three layers of terrain have been superimposed upon the animals contemporaneous with the last flood. Now note that in the ordinary course of human affairs, it is not antiquities that we seek, it is novelties. Such is the great law of civilization, progress. Why did the government choose M. Ingres, an antediluvian, rather than

M. Delacroix, rather than Courbet? Note that considering only the talent of execution or the difference in taste, which it is a rule not to dispute, the three are equal, or almost equal. How then, once again, does the government prefer, in matters of art, decrepitude to youth, antiques to new inventions? Is art an element of civilization or decadence? Is it measured, like the value of certain...

paintings, by the accumulation of years? Is it a matter of archaeology? Or is it like politics, which, from time immemorial, has had a horror of new ideas, and whose march runs counter to history? In this way, the latest arrivals in painting would be the worst. What good, then, are encouragements and rewards? Let us let things go, if not rather follow the advice of Plato and Rousseau, and ostracize this so-called art world, a swarm of parasites and the corrupt. And, indeed, if innovators in art, as well as in religion and politics, must be condemned, it is not Courbet alone who must be proscribed, but everyone. One thing is certain: ever since art became a profession, a kind of industry, a specialty in society, either instinctive or an imitation of what was happening around it, it has constantly turned its back on its tradition. The Dutch school broke with the Italian; the latter repudiated the Middle Ages, which, for its part, had energetically protested against paganism. Among the Greeks and Romans themselves, the school that produced Laocoön and The Gladiator is no longer the same as that which produced Hercules at Rest or Apollo Vanquishing the Serpent. Between these two schools, there is the same distance as between Messrs. Ingres and Delacroix. Mr. Courbet has been much criticized for not having been able to formulate his system; But what school of art has ever known what it was doing, what it thought, by virtue of what principle it marched, acted? This ignorance of oneself and one's destiny is even, according to the most profound critics, what essentially distinguishes the genius of the arts; to such an extent that in becoming a thinker, one ceases, according to them, to be an artist, and that, if one wishes to form a theoretical idea of art, determine its function, judge its works, and bring it back to common sense, one will approach the truth all the more the less troubled one's imagination is by the illusions of art. This is also my opinion; and if you take the trouble to read what follows, dear reader, I dare to hope, without presuming too much of you or insulting you, that you will share my sentiment. It is therefore up to us laymen, people of servile labor and dry analysis,

to take stock of art and to regulate the position of artists: it is necessary, since art constantly throws them beyond practical reason, since, despite the richness of their imagination and the luxury of their eloquence, despite their colossal vanity, they are unable to answer for themselves and justify their works. I know nothing, through study or apprenticeship, of painting, any more than I know of sculpture or music. I have always loved their productions, as any barbarian loves what seems beautiful to him, what shines, what flatters his imagination, his...

heart and senses, as children love prints. I love them even more since I took it into my head, not long ago, to reason about them. It is already clear that artists have nothing to fear, for their personal esteem and for the interest their works deserve, from the conclusions I may draw.

But, you might say, this general goodwill cannot justify your presumption. It is possible that someone who is only an artist is completely unskilled in explaining the things they are supposed to know best; but such a person could add to the practice of art the habits of the philosophical mind: it is up to them to speak. As for you, you are already failing in the first rule of common sense, which forbids speaking of what one knows nothing about. A stranger to the arts, not having even read what Winckelmann, Lessing, or Goethe have written about it, you are without title, incompetent.

I admit that appearances are unfavorable to me. I insist, however, and I protest, both on my own behalf and on behalf of the vast majority of the public, who resemble me, against this refusal, for two reasons.

I am, it is true, one of that innumerable multitude who know nothing of art, as far as execution and its secrets are concerned; who, far from swearing by a school, are incapable of appreciating skill of the hand, difficulty overcome, the science of means and processes; but whose approval is ultimately the only one sought by artists; for whom alone art ingenuities and creates. This multitude has the right to declare what it rejects or prefers, to express its tastes, to impose its will on artists, without anyone, head of state or expert, being able to speak for it and act as its interpreter. It is prone to error, even about what it seeks and loves best; its taste,

such as it is, often needs to be awakened and exercised: after all, it is the judge and pronounces supremely. It can say, and no one can reply: I command; it is up to you, artists, to obey. For if your art repels my inspiration; if it claims to impose itself on my fantasy, instead of following it; if it dares to challenge my judgments; in a word, if it is not made for me, I despise it with all its wonders; I deny it. Then I noticed that all of us, as far as ideas and feelings are concerned, nature has made us almost equally artists; that while the progress of knowledge among us is slow, requiring study and effort, aesthetic education is rapid; that there everything is done by reflection, here by spontaneity; that, similar in intellectual faculty, we are only original, we only demonstrate our freedom and our personality through our artistic faculty; that

Authority in such matters is therefore inadmissible; and furthermore, that all arts arising from the same principle, having the same purpose, being governed by the same rules; these rules themselves being as simple as they are few in number, it was sufficient for each of us to consult ourselves to be able, after a brief information, to express a judgment on any work of art. This is how I became an art critic; and I vehemently urge all my readers, in the interest of art itself, to follow my example. I judge works of art by man's natural taste for beautiful things, and above all by what I have learned in literature. Following the example of MM. Thiers, Guizot, and others, who are, I imagine, hardly more artists than myself, I believed I could allow myself to expound my way of seeing and feeling, not to be authoritative, but so that artists would know their audience and then act accordingly. I do not have aesthetic intuition; I lack that spontaneous feeling of taste that allows one to judge immediately whether a thing is beautiful or not; and it is always only through reflection and analysis that I arrive at an appreciation of beauty. But it seems to me that the faculties of taste and those of the understanding are not so distinct that they cannot supplement each other: in this respect, it will perhaps be seen with some interest the efforts I have made to understand the masterpieces of art and consequently to make rules for myself. My status as a judge being established, I do not hesitate to produce the documents. Regarding Courbet, I say that those who have cast contempt on the more or less eccentric works of this artist, and those who have attempted to defend them, admirers and detractors alike, have demonstrated poor judicial judgment. They have failed

to analyze and classify their man; they have failed to understand that in painting, no more and no less than in literature and in everything else, thought is the principal, the dominant thing; that the question of substance always takes precedence over that of form, and that in all artistic creation, before judging the matter of taste, one must settle the debate on the idea. Now, what is Courbet's idea, not only in one of his paintings, but in his entire work? This is what it was appropriate to explain first. Instead of responding, they hastened to raise a flag on which they wrote, without knowing what they were doing, REALISM; criticism has scoured the countryside, and now Courbet, thanks to this metaphysical nickname, has become a sort of sphinx, to which the progress of French art seems to have clung for ten years.

I, in turn, may be mistaken: that is what the reader will judge; but it seems to me that nothing could have been easier, after having examined half a dozen

paintings of the famous innovator, the most significant, than to extract their fundamental thought; having done this, to judge the scope of the innovation, to assign it its rank in the series of schools; to specify the rules by which Courbet and all artists must be judged, and to give them all what they still seem to lack: the full, complete, and philosophical awareness of their mission. No, Courbet is not a sphinx, and his paintings are not monsters. I fear reducing to a question of personalities a subject that concerns art as a whole; but I will believe I have deserved well of the public and of artists, and serve progress, if, in the case of one man, I succeed in laying the foundations of a rational and serious art criticism. There are, in painting as in the fine arts, general rules, higher principles that derive from reason, and which neither artist nor philosopher can evade. If one can lack taste while being right, there is no taste contrary to reason. Now, it is these general principles of criticism that I propose to establish, with the help of which one can judge and classify, not only the painter Courbet, but all artists, whoever they may be, and chart the course. I want to provide the rules of judgment: the public will judge.

CHAPTER II

On the Principle of Art, or Man's Aesthetic Faculty

The first person who, beyond his physical attractions and material needs, was able to perceive in nature a pleasant, interesting, singular, magnificent, or terrifying object; who became attached to it, made it an amusement, an adornment, a souvenir; who, communicating his admiration to his host, his brother, his mistress, made them accept the object as a precious token of esteem, friendship, or love, was the first artist. The little girl who makes herself a crown of cornflowers, the woman who composes a necklace of shells, precious stones, or pearls, the warrior who, to make himself more terrifying, dresses himself in a bear or lion skin, are artists.

This faculty is unique to our species; The animal, like Horace's philosopher, admires nothing, shows no taste in anything, does not distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly, any more than between just and unjust. He is without self-esteem and without delicacy, without baseness as without pride, insensitive to all that we call the beauties and harmonies of nature. He is happy as he is, does not aspire to glory, does not dream of enhancing his appearance with a borrowed ornament, of festooning his lair; he lives without ceremony and without embarrassment, sheltered from envy as from ridicule. He keeps the memory of those he loves, whom he hates or whom he fears; deprived of his young, of his companion, he will be seen to die of regret; but he will not make a relic of their remains, and of their memory a sort of cult. Free, he consumes his provisions in nature; He has never been seen cooking them in the sun, marinating them in salt and spices, or combining them together in such a way as to multiply his pleasures. In terms of culinary art, he can rival the wisdom of Pythagoras.

I therefore call aesthetics the faculty that man has of perceiving or

discovering the beautiful and the ugly, the pleasant and the unsightly, the sublime and the trivial,

in oneself and in things, and to make of this perception a new means of enjoyment, a refinement of voluptuousness.

Thus determined in its principle and in its object, art makes of everything an instrument or a material, from the simplest geometric figure to the most splendid flowers, from the acanthus leaf sculpted on the Corinthian capital, to the human person carved in marble, cast in bronze, and elevated to a divinity. All of life will be enveloped in art: birth, marriage, funerals, harvests, vintages, battles, departure, absence, return, nothing will happen, nothing will be done without ceremony, poetry, dance, or music. The lover paints a portrait of his mistress; the husband covers his wife with jewelry and precious fabrics; the hunter is not content to eat his game; He surrounds himself with images of horses, dogs, birds, and wild beasts; the chieftain raises his roof on columns like the pines and oaks that support the dark vault of the forests; the table on which he eats his meals has the feet of a ram or a goat; the vessel that contains his drink represents a bird whose neck serves as a neck and its beak as an orifice. Constantly occupied with raising himself in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, he takes care of his gait, his clothing, and his language, punctuating his speeches, making comparisons and parables, inventing a refrain, a couplet, a lament, formulating his sentences, and speaking in apophthegms. Abstaining from coarse manners, shocking gestures, and words of ill omen is the first duty of a well-educated man. Urbanity or politeness is the first and, to date, the most positive and precious of the effects of art. Everything becomes an occasion or pretext for it: a fleeting dove, a dead sparrow, a crushed fly inspire a masterpiece. Once launched, the imagination never stops: the raging ocean, the deep desert reveal unequaled beauties to it; the most disgusting objects are transformed into monuments of luxury and pride: our peasants know what a well-dressed manure pile in front of a farmhouse indicates coquetry and bravery among the young ladies of the house. Such is the fact in its nakedness; the question is to know what it contains. Let us attempt to analyze it. I find in this faculty of art, in this continual care that man has to enhance his person and everything related to it with ornaments sometimes borrowed from nature, sometimes made by his own hands, three

things. The first is a certain feeling, a vibration or resonance of the soul, at the sight of certain things, or rather certain appearances deemed by it to be beautiful or horrible, sublime or ignoble. This is what the word aesthetics indicates, from the Greek aïsthêsis, feminine, which means sensitivity or feeling. The faculty of feeling

therefore (understand beauty or ugliness, the sublime or the base, happiness or unhappiness), to grasp a thought, a feeling in a form, to be joyful or sad without real cause, at the simple sight of an image, this is in us the principle or first cause of art. This consists of what I will call the artist's power of invention; his talent (of execution) will consist in conveying to the souls of others the feeling he experiences. This first, fundamental cause of art engenders a second, from which art will draw all its development. Endowed with this aesthetic faculty, man applies it to himself: he wants to be beautiful, to make himself beautiful, noble, glorious, sublime, and to become more and more so. To deny him this merit, to combat this pretension, is to insult him. If art has its principle in the aesthetic faculty, poetic sense, or whatever one wishes to call it, it receives its impulse from self-esteem or self-love. The first of these two faculties provides the seed; the second is the driving force, which produces growth. Finally, from the combined action of these two causes, the aesthetic faculty and self-love, a third faculty is born, called to play a major role in art, but which is nevertheless not absolutely indispensable to it, and in any case remains secondary: the faculty of imitation. To reproduce, in fact, through painting, statuary, or in any other manner, an object that pleases, is to enjoy it again, to compensate for its absence and loss, and very often to embellish it further. Poetry, song, music, dance, pomp or processions, all serve the same purpose. Let us therefore remember this, contrary to what some authors have claimed, who have seen in the faculty of imitation the principle of art, that it is not at all, however eminent it is supposed, any more than self-esteem, what constitutes the artist. Just as one can be a skilled versifier without being a poet, so too can an individual possess a great aptitude for reproduction or imitation, without that individual being able to call himself an artist. Where soul, sensitivity, is lacking, there is no art, there is only craft. On this point, the public and critics, even the most clear-sighted, are liable to be mistaken, taking, on the faith of their own ideal, the illusions of drawing, of modeling, which are within them, for signs of genius in others. In an age of charlatanism

like ours, this species abounds: it is not uncommon to see it usurp the honors and reputation due to true artists.

All this and what follows has been said by others, I suppose, and I ask the reader's pardon for dragging him into these commonplaces. But perhaps the same things have not been expressed as I express them, nor in the order in which I express them; in any case, as we cannot reason about art

contemporary art without going back to ancient art, nor speaking of ancient art without referring to its principles, I was forced to rehash these elements a little. I hate poorly followed ideas; I only understand what is clearly expressed by words, formulated by logic, and fixed in writing.

What we have just said, that art rests on a triple foundation: knowledge, aesthetic faculty, or poetic sense, self-cult, or self-esteem, and the power of imitation, provides material for a few reflections that it is essential to record here as briefly as possible.

a) Firstly, from the fact that our soul has the faculty of sensing, at first sight and before any reflection, independently of any interest, beautiful things, it follows, contrary to what great philosophers teach, that the idea of beauty is not in us a pure conception of the mind, but that it has its own objectivity; In other words, this beauty that attracts us is not an imaginary thing, but real. So that art is not simply the expression of our aesthetics,1 if you will allow me this neologism; it corresponds to a positive quality of things. I will not engage in long reasoning on this. It would be inconceivable that the idea of beauty were a creation from scratch of the human mind, without reality in nature. What then is the mind, if not nature having consciousness of itself? Is not what constitutes beauty order, symmetry, proportion, the harmony of tones, colors, movements, richness, brilliance, purity, all things that can be measured with a compass, calculated by numbers, appear or disappear by a simple addition or subtraction of matter? In the horse, the conditions of beauty are intertwined with vigor, solidity, speed, and frame, qualities that are essentially physiological and positive. On this point, the veterinarian and the cavalry officer know as much as the most accomplished artist. When the first man, stretching out his arms to Eve, proclaimed her the most beautiful of creatures, he was not embracing a phantom, but beauty in the flesh. What has led

metaphysicians astray here is their mistaking a faculty of perception for a faculty of creation: from the fact that we have, by privilege, the faculty of perceiving beauty in ourselves and in nature, they have concluded that beauty exists only in our minds; which amounts to saying that light, not existing for the blind, is a conception of the clairvoyant. b) Undoubtedly, beauty does not exist for those who are incapable of seeing it; Moreover, the same objects, whatever their intrinsic beauty, do not arouse the same liveliness of feeling in all men. This is a fact that I do not deny and that it is important to note. What follows from this? That in the work of art, the artist places

of his own as much as it borrows from nature; consequently, that art, without ever being able to completely strip itself of all objectivity, nevertheless remains personal, free, mobile: finally, that the more spontaneity and originality the artist displays in his work, the more independence the spectator retains with regard to it: hence the well-known precept: De gustibus et coloribus non disputandum. Certainly, there are things on whose beauty everyone agrees; but there are a much greater number regarding which feelings are divided, without their beauty being held in doubt for that reason. This divergence stems from what is true of our aesthetic faculty as of our memory, our intelligence, our senses: it does not have the same power, the same penetration in everyone; not to mention that the same objects or the same aspects do not offer us all equal interest. Taste is often slow to form; we love at one time what we reject at another; we correct ourselves. Often the person we should love is the one who begins by displeasing; we have seen passionate lovers take an aversion to each other and declare their complete incompatibility. Alceste, imagining that he loves Célimène, and persisting in loving her even after he has recognized her coquettishness, is a man who is unaware of himself: what he needed was neither the frivolous Célimène nor the wise Éliante; it was a combination of the two, a cheerful, witty, seductive person, seemingly frivolous, but at heart reasonable: such was Orgon's wife, Elmire.

There is not a man who has not loved at least one pretty woman in his life, which presupposes that all women are beautiful; and I agree with this sentiment. But, of all these charming creatures, there is usually only one that pleases you: which means that the habits of

our life, our education, our acquired ideas, our temperament, modify our aesthetic clairvoyance, and reduce the world of beauty for each of us to narrow limits. c) What is even sadder: whatever the initial vivacity of the feeling, it cannot be sustained. The impression is fleeting; with habit, admiration weakens; the adored object becomes vulgar, insipid, unpleasant. The manifestations of art are like fireworks, which we admire for the time of a shooting star, but which we would not go to see for three days in a row, and which many people are content to have witnessed once. Hence, a coldness of the soul, inconstancy of the heart, and fickleness. Hence, after having exalted human dignity through the image of beauty, the need to fortify it against the defection and aberrations of the ideal. Man, whose aesthetic faculty is deranged, is forced to constantly seek a new idol, changes his tastes, his fashions, his friends, his

mistresses, without ever being able to settle down. Such is the type of Don Juan. A detestable failing, which makes one disgusted with work, study, family, law, and duty, which produces the most hideous vices and great villains. d) Last observation: the beauty of an object can generally be considered as a testimony to the excellence of this object, its power, and its good constitution. Beauty is the resplendence of truth, said Plato. But it in no way follows that the aesthetic sensitivity of the artist testifies to the depth of his knowledge or the penetration of his mind; far from it, one can say that it is in inverse proportion to the philosophical spirit. It is hardly only on this condition that an artist reaches the heights of his profession. Undoubtedly, art does not reject science; it is even forbidden, under penalty of ridiculousness, to contradict it; he is condemned to refer to it as it occurs. But he does not wait for it; he anticipates it in its blossoming, surpasses it in its progress, prejudges it with his inspirations, and even goes so far, in centuries of ignorance and among the multitude of weak minds, as to supplement it. It is the same with law and morality: the aesthetic power of a poet, of an artist destined to celebrate great men, is far from being a guarantee of the firmness of his conscience and a certificate of his morality. I could cite examples of severe virtue among our most eminent artists: despite this, it is only too true that the pursuers of the ideal, whether professional artists or not, are the most fragile of human beings. Certainly, art, by its nature, is not averse to justice, any more than it is to philosophy; It is even

forbidden, under penalty of forfeiture, to oppose law and morality. But art, in its fiery impulse, no more awaits law and the law than it awaits knowledge; its evolution is much more rapid: it takes the lead, and often, even in advanced societies, it is art whose vague, mystical cult replaces, in admiring and loving souls, the severe, precise, and imperative law of morality.

From these general considerations on the principle and organic conditions of art, it follows that, if the aesthetic faculty, like the philosophical faculty, has its basis both in the mind and in things, I would even say in observation, since we are dealing here with a certain kind of appearances; If, like philosophy, it has before it the infinity of nature and humanity, it nevertheless does not march as its equal, it does not hold high rank, either in public opinion or in history. Its role is that of an auxiliary; it is a faculty more feminine than virile, predestined for obedience, and whose development must ultimately be regulated by the

legal and scientific development of the species. The progress of art, if there is progress, will not have its cause within itself: it will receive its growth from outside. Left to its own devices, art, fanciful by nature, can only turn on itself: it is condemned to immobility.

1 Anesthesia, insensitivity, a medical term, is used only in the physiological sense.

CHAPTER III

On the Ideal – Goal and Definition of Art

We have recognized the principle of art; we have observed under what circumstances and in what manner this faculty manifests itself in us, the play of which must play such a large part in our lives and in civilization as a whole. We finally know what specifically distinguishes the artist from other men, and what we can expect from him. What now is this invisible, this something that pleases us in things, that moves us, that inspires joy, tenderness, melancholy, sometimes horror or disgust, and whose effect the artist, through his reproductions, is called upon to further enhance? Can we understand it, name it, define it? Facts have demonstrated to us that there positively exists within us a particular faculty, different from sensory perception, memory, judgment, imagination, consciousness, and logic, and which we have called the aesthetic faculty or power of art. Now, a faculty cannot be conceived without an object: what then is its proper object, the object of art consequently? It is important to study it in itself, to analyze it, to define it, if possible. This object of art, still so little understood, is what everyone calls the ideal.

Realism, idealism, terms poorly explained and become almost unintelligible, even to artists. I will surprise more than one by affirming that art is, like nature itself, both realistic and idealistic: that Courbet and his imitators are no exception to the rule; that it is equally impossible for a painter, a sculptor, or a poet to eliminate either the real or the ideal from their work, and that, if they tried, they would thereby cease to be artists. Let us first prove the inseparability of the two terms.

Take from the neighboring butcher a quarter of a slaughtered animal, beef, pork, or

sheep; place it in front of a telescope, so as to receive its image reversed behind the telescope, in a dark room, on an iodide metal plate: this image traced by light is obviously, as an image and from the point of view of art, everything you can imagine as being most realistic. It is a dead, dismembered body, a shapeless block of meat; as for the image obtained, it is the work of a natural agent, which the photographer has been able to bring into play, but in whose action he himself plays no part. Who can awaken the aesthetic feeling here? Where is the ideal?

Yet it is certain that this realism is not devoid of any ideal, nor powerless to awaken in us the slightest aesthetic spark: for, without counting the butcher and the cook, who know very well how to say: "Here is beautiful or ugly meat," and who know their way around; Not counting the gourmet, who is also not insensitive to the matter, there is here the very fact of the photographic work, one of the most marvelous phenomena we are given to observe in the universe. Say, if you will, that the aesthetic feeling aroused by this representation of a side of beef is the lowest degree of the ideal we can observe, the one immediately above zero; but do not say that the ideal is absolutely lacking here: you would be contradicted by universal sentiment. Instead of a leg of beef, a leg of mutton, or a ham placed on a stall, put an orange tree in its box, a sheaf of flowers in a porcelain vase, a child playing on a sofa: all these images, a kind of tracing created by an artist without conscience, absolutely insensitive to beauty and ugliness, but with a perfection of detail that no living artist could approach, will be realistic images, if you will, in the sense that the author, namely light, has put nothing of his own into them and has not concerned himself with you; but, as little as you pay them attention, these same images will nonetheless cause you a sensation of pleasure; they will even appear to you all the more pleasant, therefore less realistic, more ideal, as the objects represented themselves move away from pure materiality, as they participate in your life, your soul, your intelligence. The separation of the real and the ideal is therefore impossible, first in nature, which gives us one and at least suggests the other; even more so in art, even if this art were reduced to a simple photograph. This separation is impossible, I say, first because beauty, more or less hidden, is everywhere in the universe, opera Dei perfecta; then because we have eyes and a heart that know how to discover it; Plato affirms this separation when he says that

Ideas, that is, the eternal types of all created things, existed before creation in the mind of God. But who today accepts this Platonic theosophy? The ideas of things are inherent in the things that express them, and all together, indissolubly united, constitute life and intelligence, the beauty and reality of nature.

What is true is that the ideal is more or less apparent; that it interests us more or less; that the artist can be more or less skilled in making it felt; I say more, there are cases where art can only make the ideal disappear by trying to imitate it; according to this, the question of art, its object and its purpose no longer leaves any uncertainty. Is the artist's goal simply to reproduce objects, without worrying about anything else, to think only of visible reality, and to leave the ideal to the will of the spectator? In other words, is the tendency of art to develop the ideal or rather to a purely material imitation, of which photography would be the last effort? It is enough to pose the question thus for everyone to resolve it: art is nothing except through the ideal, is worth nothing except through the ideal; if it limits itself to a simple imitation, copy, or counterfeit of nature, it would do better to abstain; it would only display its own insignificance, by dishonoring the very objects it would have imitated. The greatest artist will therefore be the greatest idealizer; to maintain the contrary would be to overturn all notions, to lie to our nature, to deny beauty, and to reduce civilization to savagery.

A Greek, Lysander, I believe, was invited to come and listen to a man who imitated, to the point of deception, the song of the nightingale. "Many thanks," he said. "I have often heard the nightingale itself. This Greek truly had an aesthetic sense. Note that he did not speak ill of the nightingale; on the contrary, it was the touching, delightful memory he had retained of the singer of the nights that made him refuse to hear an imitation. What did he care about a buffoon, imitating, for a few drachmas, and spoiling one of nature's most lively harmonies? I have seen many of these whistlers of blackbirds and nightingales, and I can say that never has a feat of strength or throat-sounding seemed more unpleasant to me. The renewal of life in spring, the beauty of the nights, universal love, I know not what sweet melancholy, insinuating itself into the soul at the sight of all these things, and of which Philomela's solo suddenly becomes the interpreter; this is what makes the nightingale's accents so poetic. Therein lies the ideal; the unfortunate beggar

who, without any feeling for art or nature, counterfeits this divine song, is a dreadful realist.

We have just named the ideal: let us now analyze this notion.

Ideal, idealis, an adjective derived from idea, idea, is that which conforms to the idea or relates to it. But what is the idea itself? The idea, according to the Greek etymology of the word, is the typical, specific, generic notion that the mind forms of a thing, abstracting from all materiality. Ideal is therefore said, etymologically, of an object considered in the purity and generality of its essence, outside of all empirical realization, variety, and accident. An ideal Frenchman, for example, like a Frenchman in general, is nothing other than the purely intelligible notion or type of the French man; it is neither Peter, nor Paul, nor James, born in Provence, Gascony, or Brittany; It is a fictitious being, uniting in its person, to the most eminent degree, all the good and bad qualities of the French subject, as it is present throughout the territory of France. It will be the same for an ideal ox; which will be neither Durham, nor Norman, nor Swiss; for an animal, a tree, or any other ideal thing: these are conceptions of the bovine species, of the animal or plant kingdom, according to their general characteristics raised to their highest power, but which exist nowhere. Ideal, in a word, indicates a generalization, not a reality, the opposite of the observable individual, consequently an antithesis of the real.

From this first meaning of the word ideal follows this other: since the idea is the pure, exact, immutable type of things, it is their perfection, their absolute. An ideal thing, conforming to its idea, to its archetype, is a thing perfect in its kind, as would be a sphere whose radii were all perfectly equal. But such a sphere does not exist in nature, and it is no less impossible for industry to produce it, since nothing realized in matter can be adequate to its idea; which does not prevent the geometer from imagining such a sphere and applying its applications to it as much as possible. We would be committing bad geometry, bad mechanics, bad industry, if, in these kinds of affairs, we neglected to get as close as possible to our ideal.

According to this deduction, both logical and etymological, the word ideal is therefore used for any object uniting all perfections to the highest degree, more beautiful than all the models offered by nature: ideal beauty, ideal figure. It has been made into a noun, the

IDEAL, that is, the perfect form revealed to us in every object, and of which this object is only a more or less approximate realization. From this explanation, it follows that the ideal, not existing, cannot be represented and painted: such a representation is contradictory. A figure cannot unite all the varieties of French, and at the same time be the

portrait of the Lyonnais, the Alsatian, the Béarnais; whether you like it or not, it must be one or the other, unless it is no one at all. Similarly, art will not create an ideal animal, at once quadruped, bird, fish, reptile; in this genre, it can only produce monsters. The same is true of ideal beauty: a woman, a goddess, cannot be both blonde and brunette, tall and short, strong and delicate. Whatever the artist does, the beauty he represents will always be more or less a portrait, a particular creation. There is even one thing here that profoundly distinguishes art from industry: it is that, as we will show later, while the industrialist is forced to scrupulously obey the laws of geometry, mechanics, and calculation, that is, the absolute, on pain of constituting himself a loss, the artist, depending on the goal he sets out to achieve and the effect he wishes to produce, can deviate more or less from his archetype: it is this optional deviation that produces variety and life in art. But let us return.

Since the ideal is a pure conception of the mind, it cannot be expressed physically, except in an approximate manner, nor consequently be painted; and yet it is the vision and impression of the ideal that constitutes the entire object of art, one wonders what, in art, is the use of this ideal, in what manner it can be conceived, to what extent manifested by the artist. Such is the capital, and, it seems, still unresolved, question of aesthetics.

And this is what I want to try to explain, at least as far as I have been able to acquire the right, through my own aesthetics, through reasoning, and also a little, in my capacity as a writer, through practice, to speak of these things.

By virtue of the ideal that objects reveal to us, without it being possible for us ever to reproduce it, we have the faculty to straighten, correct, embellish, enlarge things; to diminish, diminish, distort them; to change their proportions; In a word, to do everything that nature does, which, while creating according to the types or ideals within it, nevertheless produces only particular

realizations, more or less inexact and imperfect. It is therefore the work of nature that the artist CONTINUES, by producing in turn images based on certain ideas of his own, which he wishes to communicate to us. These figures of the artist are more or less beautiful, meaningful, expressive, depending on the thought that animates him: I am here ignoring execution. To this end, we can say that the artist has at his disposal an infinite scale of tones, of figures, ranging from the ideal to the point where the type ceases to be recognizable.

By thus making himself, for what is his own, the continuator of nature,

The artist is in the full flow of human activity, whose development in all respects, through science, industry, economics, and politics, can be defined as a continuation of the creative work. If we had no ideas other than those with which nature endows us through the spectacle of its creations; if all our knowledge were inscribed in advance in things and their relationships, we would have no use for art and artists. Contemplation of the universe would suffice for our soul; our language, conforming to it, could indefinitely expand its dictionary; but, as for its constitution, its forms, its poetry, it would stand still; our idealism would be indistinguishable from our philosophy, and our art would be limited to photographic reproductions. But nature has not told us everything; it has not thought everything, it does not know everything; It knows nothing of our social life, which is in itself a new world, a second nature; it can teach us nothing about our relationships, our feelings, the movement of our souls, the changing influence it exerts on us, the new aspects in which we see it, the changes we subject it to. All this constantly suggests to us new ideas, new ideals, for which we need new expressions, a new language, a language not only philosophical, but aesthetic. Let us try to make this clear.

For the philosopher or scholar, expression, formulated by words or signs, although naturally imperfect, must be, as far as possible, adequate to the idea, precise, rigorous. The language of law, that of mathematics, and logic are examples of this. Here, as in industry and mechanics, it is not permitted to voluntarily deviate from the type, to add or subtract from it, to say more or less than what is. Artistic expression, on the contrary, which aims to excite a certain sensitivity in us, is augmentative or diminishing, laudatory or

depreciative; it is never, it cannot be an adequate expression, a tracing, which would be the very death of art. So that the enslavement to the pure idea, which characterizes philosophy, the sciences, industry, is precisely what destroys the aesthetic impression, the feeling of the ideal; while artistic license, on the contrary, is what gives birth to it. What we call figures in poetry and eloquence are an example of this: these figures, intended to enhance thought, to give it more force, depth, and interest, are what I would call idealisms.

Let it be understood, then, that the sole purpose of art is not to make us admire things that are beautiful in form, first by reproducing them, then, by virtue of

the ideal, by adding to their beauty, or, what amounts to the same thing, by opposing them with the contrast of ugliness: all this is only the beginning of the artist's career. Our moral life is composed of much more than this superficial and sterile contemplation: there is the immense variety of human actions and passions, prejudices and beliefs, conditions and castes, the family, religion, the city; domestic comedy, the tragedy of the forum, the national epic; there are revolutions. All this is matter of art as well as of philosophy, and must be expressed not only according to the rules of scientific observation, but also according to those of the ideal. Thus art, even more than science and industry itself, is essentially concrete, particularistic, and determinative like nature; and it is by means of this particularism, this determination, these concrete forms, that it instills more deeply the feeling of beauty and the sublime, the love of perfection, the ideal. The fables of La Fontaine, the parables of the Gospel, as well as the masterpieces of painting and statuary, make this understood.

"The ideal," said Eugène Delacroix, "is everything that goes with our idea, imitated or invented. What then is it that goes with the idea and strikes the soul? It is this je ne sais quoi, inspiration." (French Artists, by TH. Sylvestre, 1861). This definition, taken in itself, presents no kind of meaning. Inspiration, this je ne sais quoi, that which goes with the idea and strikes the soul, are words written in black characters on blue clouds. After the somewhat lengthy analysis we have entered into, we see what Eugène Delacroix felt, without being able to express it: that there exists within us a distinct faculty that art is called upon to serve; that this faculty

consists in the perception of pure ideas, archetypes of things—as a result of the beautiful and the sublime, or the ideal—that the artist's mission is not to show us, but to make us feel, by means of words or signs, and by using figures, which we have called idealisms.

We can now give the definition of art.

We observed previously (Chapter II) that the aesthetic faculty was within us a second-rate faculty; that where it became predominant, there was a debasement of the subject, and that the role of the artist, whose aim was to excite in us moral sensitivity, feelings of dignity and delicacy, through the vision of the ideal, was an auxiliary role. It is through this, we added in this chapter, that the artist is called upon to contribute to the creation of the social world, a continuation of the natural world. Let us add that the beautiful and the sublime, or the ideal, do not

are not only seen in the outward form of being; they also exist in the mind and morals. Everywhere, it is identical and adequate. I therefore define art: An idealistic representation of nature and ourselves, with a view to the physical and moral improvement of our species. The review we are about to make of the principal manifestations of art will demonstrate the accuracy of this definition, given by theory.

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Man seeks himself in all his works of art; his goal is always his self, his personality. He finds himself as much in the landscape as in his own effigy. The feeling for nature is weak in the beginnings where the cities are small; it becomes more vivid in the heart of large capitals: see Virgil who mourns his countryside in the middle of Rome.

3Taken substantively, the ideal is distinguished from the IDEA in that the latter remains abstract as a type,

while it is the more or less pleasant, magnificent, or expressive covering that imagination, poetry, or sentiment give it.

Examples: IDEA: It is safer to live in a humble condition than in a high position. – Ideal: Fable of the Oak and the Reed; Combat of the Rats and the Weasels, where the princes of the army of rats, with their aigrettes, unable to enter the holes, are all massacred. IDEA:

An artist is commissioned to create a statue of Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French. – Ideal: Will he be in the costume of a general, a Roman emperor, or a gray frock coat? IDEA: Maternal tenderness. – Ideal: A hen and her chicks, the pelican, the sarigue; a woman nursing a child; the lion of Florence.

IDEA: A cow is a cow; it is hardly susceptible to an ideal. – Ideal: If, however, you paint a herd of cows on the mountain, the bell-bearer at the head, the calves leaping around it, a chalet in the background, you will have a more or less poetic ensemble in which the cow is idealized. IDEA: A head of Christ is requested. – Ideal: Christ suffering, Christ triumphant; the most beautiful of the children of men, or the most desolate of prophets.

This explanation gives, and one will understand, what I mean by idealism. Taken in a general sense, as materialism, sensualism, communism, idealism is the system of the ideal, the system where the ideal is the principle and end of everything.

Taken in a particular sense, as archaism, sophism, solecism, theologism, idealism is a trait, a figure, a gesture, a scene, conceived outside of reality, but not outside of nature, and serving to express or arouse a feeling in others. Idealism adds nothing to the idea, and serves only to determine and reinforce the expression.

Thus, Greek beauty, deemed absolute, or geometric, or canonical, is an idealism; the figures of Satyrs, Fauns, Priapuses, Furies, are others. The figure of Saint Michael and that given to Satan; that of Jesus Christ in Raphael's Transfiguration, Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper; that of the Virgin, are idealisms. Ask a painter to paint Harpagon, M. Jourdain, or Tartuffe for you, and he will give you idealisms. For the same reason, the snake biting its tail, symbolizing eternity, is

An idealism: every allegorical or emblematic figure comes from the ideal. It is the same in poetry and eloquence: meter, rhyme, consonances, figures, descriptions, oratorical movements, are idealisms: means employed by our aesthetic faculty to idealize objects and render our impressions more vividly. In a portrait, you like to encounter first the resemblance, then the character, habitual thought, and passion of the subject: something that art will give you better and more surely than the daguerreotype, which can only

capture a figure instantaneously, and therefore with the least possible ideality. There is therefore no painter, artist, poet, novelist, orator who does not have recourse to the ideal at every moment: THE IDEAL IS ALL ART.

CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

EGYPT: Typical, Symbolic, Allegorical Art; Freedom and the Force of Collectivity in Art

It follows from the above that art does not have its higher reason or its end in itself, any more than industry does; that it is not a dominant faculty within us, but a subordinate faculty, the dominant faculty being justice and truth. Justice and truth, conscience and science, law and knowledge, complementary, correlative, and adequate terms, which express the two great functions of human life, to the service of which, I repeat, art and industry are subject, ex aequo.

But if art is subordinate to justice and science, how can it be said that it is free, the highest expression of freedom? I greatly fear raising the protest here of artists, accustomed to the idea of complete independence of art, and practicing it as best they can, without offending them, in their lives as in their works. Art is free, they say; therefore the artist is free to do what he wants, to choose his subjects, to treat them as he sees fit—too bad for him if he isn't appreciated, and too bad for others.

"What is art for?" you ask. "Nothing: it doesn't need to serve any purpose; it's fantasy: now, fantasy excludes the idea of service, as well as of principle, logic, and rules. "Where does art go? Wherever it pleases: everywhere and nowhere. Where does the butterfly go, where does the breeze go, where does the cloud go, tossed, like a flake of wool, by the winds? "The goal, the object of art?" Whatever you please, quodlibet. Cry, laugh, have fun, wriggle, and then sleep,

If you feel like it: that's what art is all about. Beyond that, it's mechanical, fabricated, slick, and worse than that, pedantry and grimace... I greatly regret not being able to reason with the levity of

these friends of art: perhaps I would be more successful in making myself understood. – Logic has a heavy hand, and justice is not always cheerful. Let's try, however. I suppose and I put it into principle that art does not ask to be freer than freedom itself. Now, we see, it is everyday experience, the most unequivocal sign of progress, that freedom, of which we are rightly proud, does not consist in freeing ourselves from the laws of truth and justice; on the contrary, it grows as we approach more closely what is just and true; it declines, on the other hand, as we move away from it; so that the fullness of freedom coincides with the fullness of right and knowledge, and the deepest servitude with extreme ignorance and corruption. How then could it be otherwise with art, which I also regard as the proper and specific expression of freedom? How would it be sustained, would it develop, if, possessing neither its material nor its reason in itself, it did not rely on these two pillars of all freedom, the just and the true? Art for art's sake, as it has been called, having no legitimacy in itself, resting on nothing, is nothing. It is debauchery of the heart and dissolution of the mind. Separated from right and duty, cultivated and sought after as the highest thought of the soul and the supreme manifestation of humanity, art or the ideal, stripped of its best part, reduced to nothing more than an excitement of fantasy and the senses, is the principle of sin, the origin of all servitude, the poisoned source from which flow, according to the Bible, all the fornications and abominations of the earth. It is from this point of view that the cult of letters and the arts has been so often pointed out by historians and moralists as the cause of the corruption of morals and the decadence of states; it is for the same reason that certain religions, Magism, Judaism, Protestantism, have banned it from their temples. Art for art's sake, I say, verse for verse's sake, style for style's sake, form for form's sake, fantasy for fantasy's sake, all these vanities that gnaw away at our times like a pedicular disease, are vice in all its refinement, evil in its quintessence. Transported into religion and morality, this is still called mysticism, idealism, quietism, and romanticism: a contemplative disposition where the subtlest pride unites with the deepest impurity, and which the true practitioners of morality, Voltaire as well as Bossuet, fought with all their energy.

I have explained what the freedom of art consists of, or, better said, personality.

artistic: let us repeat this once more for the instruction of those who, having made art their profession, might, to their detriment and at the risk of their reputation, be mistaken. The artist is the man endowed to an eminent degree with the faculty of sensing the ideal and of communicating to others, through signs, gestures, figures, descriptions, melodies, his impression. Now, just as the transmission of thought through ordinary language can be said to be impersonal, the means employed by the artist are imbued with his personality. The collection of the Monitor is impersonal, official style; the History of the Revolution by Michelet is personality, ideal, art. Through his personality, the artist therefore acts directly on ours; he has power over us, like a magnetizer over the magnetized; and this power is all the greater when it is exercised with a more energetic idealism, I mean, referring to my previous observations, in a more original style, with the help of more striking figures or forms; which presupposes in the artist a greater capacity for creation, a greater freedom. Young writer, young painter, young sculptor, do you feel this power? You have artistic freedom; beyond that, remember, you are only a libertine and impotent.

Facts, moreover, will perhaps finally convince those over whom reasoning has no hold. The history of art is parallel to that of religion: it is born with it, it shares its destiny; with it it rises, falls, is reborn, and is transformed; As soon as it becomes widespread, formulated into dogmas, constituted into a priesthood, and monuments erected, art is called upon to serve as its minister. Now, what is religion? The symbolism of morality, the primary form of law, the idealistic manifestation of conscience. Man, in thinking of God, dreams of himself: the figures in which he represents the Divinity are, at bottom, only testimonies he gives to himself; and the more piety he has, in other words, moral sense, the more he pays homage to the object of his worship with his best sentiments, the more he surrounds it with poetry and art. Too often, even, aesthetics, whose characteristic is to extend over everything that touches human life, to envelop it as in a mantle of glory, becomes absorbed, so to speak, in superstition; The believer remains miserable; art is monopolized by the priest.

In ancient Egypt, man is immersed in nature; he is barely distinguishable, as a species, from the animality that surrounds him; he is not certain that his ancestors were not animals; in any case, he has no doubt that the gods who protect him reveal themselves to him in bestial forms. His religion is both zoomorphic and

anthropomorphic: his art will proceed from the same

inspiration. Its language, very young, formed by analogy, essentially figurative; its writing, imagined from its language, partly ideographic and partly alphabetic, like our rebuses, would ultimately imprint their character on this art.

One finds everything in Egyptian painting and statuary: religious ceremonies, battles, triumphs, agricultural and industrial work, hunting, fishing, navigation, torture, scenes of domestic life, funerals, and even caricatures, mockeries of the enemy. I don't know if they painted portraits; it doesn't appear that they dealt with landscapes. The history and life of Egypt, its customs, its thoughts, are represented in its temples. Nothing is forgotten of what art can undertake to serve as a monument and glorification of a society: it is both a historical observation spanning a span of six thousand years and an apotheosis. In essence and in purpose, Egyptian art was faithful to its lofty mission and remained inferior to no other. But how did it achieve its ideal? That is what interests us.

Egyptian art is essentially metaphorical, like hieroglyphs, emblematic, allegorical, and symbolic—so much for the ideas; it is above all typical, enamored of symmetry, method, and certain conventions—so much for the figures. All the faces of kings, queens, priests, warriors, and ordinary individuals, which one is at first tempted to mistake for portraits, as far as I have been able to judge from simple engravings, resemble each other: Darius, Cambyses, the Ptolemies, and Tiberius himself, depicted in Egyptian costume and posture, appear no different from Amenhotep and Sesostris. They are always in the same poses, the same physiognomy, the same conventional expression. One might say that the Egyptian artists believed they were honoring their foreign masters by giving them the features of the native race, regarded by them as the race par excellence, the noblest specimen of humanity. It was a kind of nationalization they were granting them. If the Egyptians perfectly rendered their own type, they expressed with no less fidelity and exactitude the types of the nations known to them through war and victory: at a glance one recognizes in their wall paintings, not only the Negro with his varieties, but the Jew, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Greek or Ionian, the Scythian, Germanic or Gaulish – but, singularly, all these figures, so well characterized, resemble each other, on the one hand, by the exaggeration of the shoulders, the

thinning of the waist and the somewhat slender and long appearance of the limbs; – was this a beauty in ancient Egypt? – on the other, by the arrangement of the heads, generally represented in profile, with the

eyes seen from the front: and when the figure is seen from the front, the feet are held in profile: which, despite the finesse of certain details, obviously reflects inexperience in art. Now, since the same arrangements are found in monuments dating from after the Christian era and in those dating back more than two thousand years before Jesus Christ, is there not reason to believe that this strangeness was preserved on purpose, out of respect for tradition, and that it should be seen not as proof of impotence, but as a deliberate sign of immobility? Add to this an extreme search for symmetry, method, and certain conventional rules of pose and gesture that are found even in scenes involving the most agitation, battles, gymnastic exercises, even fantasies; Finally, reality and symbolism, history and mythology all mixed together: and you will have a general idea of Egyptian art and idealism.

From these general observations, I draw two conclusions of the utmost importance for the development of art. The first is that art no sooner manifested itself in a somewhat regular agglomeration of men than it received a social, political, and religious mission: in Egypt, it was no less than writing, history, chronology, dogma, metaphysics, and morality, expressed through more or less poetic and artistically executed representations: elementary and higher education, the stimulation of patriotism, the attestation of the gods, all that is best in society fell under its purview. The second consequence, much less noticed than the first, is that art, becoming a means of civilization, an instrument both political and religious, directed by the priesthood, finally forming a school, gradually acquires, through the community of thought and the constancy of traditions, a collective force that raises it far above the individual level. There is no doubt, for example, that it is thanks to this collective force that Egyptian art, despite the narrow limits within which it appears to have voluntarily kept itself, as regards its ideal, its execution, and its means, acquired an originality and a vigor of style that aesthetic anarchy would never have been able to produce. What! We know what efforts science, industry, war, and politics produce through the pooling of forces and the concurrence of ideas,

and we do not seem to suspect that the same can be true of the ideal!... The flowering of Egyptian art was long; it lasted as long as the institutions, as long as the collective thought that inspired it. The younger Champollion signaled its decline around the time of the Ptolemies; this decline was inevitable. Contact with the Greeks, the Persians, and soon the Romans and the Jews,

was to bring about a revolution of ideas, which would not have failed to result in a renewal of Egyptian art, if Egypt had continued to exist. But with the State dislocated, the priesthood turned philosophical, and therefore hypocritical, while the multitude wallowed in the most abject superstition, national autonomy lost, the aesthetic genius of old Egypt was to be extinguished: this sad end will not be the only one we will have to witness in the history of art.

CHAPTER V

GREECE: Cult of Form, Idolatrous Idealism – Corruption of Society by Art; Iconoclastic Reaction

Egypt, by focusing primarily on types and generalizations, lacked one of the essential conditions of art, which is concrete truth; it moved further away from it by pursuing a vain ideal of symmetry, uniformity, conventional figures, and ultimately fictions. This was not its fault: at the beginning of civilization, man, thinking by comparison, analogies, and images, could not raise his ideal higher. He had not yet thought of observing himself; he had not made his gods in his own image; immersed in a kind of organic pantheism, he did not feel nature in unison with his soul. Let's cross the Mediterranean and enter Hellas, barely out of its cradle, while Egypt, grandmother of the human race, counts its age by more than fifty centuries: we will take another step.

Here we find a decidedly anthropomorphic religion. The gods have localized, individualized themselves; all the dynasties, now extinct, descended from them. These immortal gods, freed from misery and pain, are perfectly beautiful: they are called the Blessed. But no one had seen them; how could one imagine their faces? Where could one find models for these divine effigies? Here we will see art modify its ideal, rise a degree, without being any more true than it had been seen, for several thousand years, in Egypt.

It is still on the human figure that all art pivots. In Egypt, where the type seems to have been, in its individualities, more or less uniform, as is observed among the Negroes, the face was considered beautiful as soon as the type was achieved. For the Greeks, a more mixed race apparently, this generality of physiognomy was insufficient. The gods did not resemble each other; all, however, had to

to be of perfect beauty. How could this be, if the type of the human figure, and consequently that of the gods, is one, absolute, invariable? A sure sign of the superiority of this race, both morally and physically, which conceives diversity in perfection. Jupiter will not be the same as Neptune, his brother, nor as Hercules or Apollo, his children. Likewise, Minerva will have nothing in common with Venus, nor the latter with Diana or Juno. A multiple beauty, always different from itself, and without a model: such is the problem posed to the Greek artist.

We know how this singular problem was resolved. Like the Egyptian artists, the Greeks resorted to generalization. Only, instead of sticking to a generic type, embracing the entire race, they observed the subjects according to their categories: men and women first; children, young people and old people; plebeians and nobles; peasants, fishermen, hunters, athletes, warriors and shepherds, the most beautiful, the best-made that could be found; and from these observations, relating not only to ethnic type, but to individual qualities, class characteristics, and everything that is most difficult to grasp in physiognomy, the gods were made. These gods were only imaginary combinations of features borrowed from several subjects; creations just as impossible as the Egyptian types: no matter, they became types of beauty, a rule of proportion, or a canon for artists. Thus each god and goddess had, with their figure, their own authentic beauty, which, once fixed, no longer varied. Everything was modeled on the gods: architecture, music, etc., and Greek art was created. As in Egypt, under the influence of the national religion, of liberty and its institutions, a common ideal was formed, a general aesthetic, a tradition, a collective power in short, which, for seven or eight centuries, filled the Greco-Roman world with masterpieces. Such was the origin of idolatry or the worship of idols, that is, of ideal beauty. In short, just as Egypt had used art to express the idea, Greece, building on this idea, used it to express beauty. Egyptian art is more dogmatic, more metaphysical; Greek art is more idealistic. It is undeniable that in passing from one to the other, the influence of the ideal increases at the expense of the notion itself, and consequently of the true, or at least of what is deemed to be the truth. A formidable tendency that earned Greece the epithet of liar, Græcia mendax, and which, after having elevated it to the highest degree of glory, was to plunge it into the abyss of all corruptions. But against beauty, any protest of

philosophical or realistic thought is vain; the most judicious criticism remains without result. Dialectics

has no hold on the ideal; and neither the heart, nor the imagination, nor the senses can object to beauty. Whatever reservations reason and morality impose on us, beauty attracts us, it possesses us; we can, through the ferocity of virtue, refuse it our homage; we remain its admirers. And when duty and honor tear us away from its seductions, how bitter the sacrifice is!... The ideal received from the Greek genius an expression that will never be surpassed. All later artists were inspired by his works; they are inspired by them every day; and whenever our humanity, eternally progressive, wishes to form an approximate idea of absolute beauty, it will turn to Greece for it. What characterizes Greek art and cannot be praised enough, after the ideal of form, is moderation, sobriety, and simplicity of means. There is never any overload, never any forced or ambitious attitude; no exaggeration, no superfluous ornamentation; it is the form alone which, in the purity of its design, the elegance of its line, serves as an ornament in itself. The same rule that governs Greek morality: nothing excessive, no refinement, no pose, governs art; the smallest vase is conceived with the same sentiment as the statues and temples of the gods. Greek architecture is based on two elements: two posts surmounted by a crosspiece, this is the colonnade, the porticoes, the pediment; this is the temple. The Roman would add the semicircular arch, the German the pointed arch; They will both build immense circuses and prodigious cathedrals: they will not erase the simple beauty, the essential beauty of Greek monuments.

But everything has been said about Greek art; the formulas for admiration are exhausted; it is a matter of judging it in itself, appreciating its effects and marking its catastrophe.

Above all, there was this much that was true in Greek art, despite its idealism: it was entirely in keeping with the circumstances of its time, and it responded to a need of the race, whose excellence it attested. Until around the time of Alexander, which is the philosophical era, the Greek nation was eminently religious, and perhaps even more enamored of freedom. As much as it demonstrated piety and fear of the gods, it also sought what could honor man. Respect for the Divinity and respect for human dignity are constantly balanced in the manifestations of this small people.

Hence the cult of form that sums up their entire moral being. Statuary served this disposition wonderfully. The Greeks themselves said that Phidias' statue of Jupiter had added to the religion of mortals; this was also true of the statues of all the gods.

and of all the goddesses: art gave a new impetus to religion, which soon became a veritable idolatry. The philosophical spirit having been awakened, the ancient faith began to weaken: how could one speak without laughing of the adventures of the Immortals? This proves how independent religious sentiment is of dogma: until the arrival of the sophists, the Greeks did not seem to suspect the absurdity of their fables, sustained by the sincerity of their conscience and ennobled by all the sublimity of their ideal. Belief shaken, art remained; ancient modesty gave way to ostentation; from the heroic that it had been, the nation became entirely artistic and dilettante. Then began the idealistic corruption, soon followed by an irreparable decadence. Greek art had given birth to its marvels in religion and justice; He reduced himself to impotence as soon as he had forgotten them.

One last observation: the Greeks, who so sought beauty of form, did not entirely ignore the use of ugliness. Mythology had given them its monsters: cyclopes, harpies, gorgons, sirens, satyrs, etc. The theater had its masks; the countryside was populated by hideous Priapuses. In poetry, Homer was the first to introduce ignoble and burlesque characters; later, there was comedy and the incomparable Aristophanes. Irony is essentially Greek. However, it does not appear that the Greeks developed the plastic arts in this direction; they were, it seems, afraid of shaming themselves, offending art, and blaspheming the gods. This was an inconsistency on their part, but it completes their introduction to us. We, who today cannot have the same scruples, will know, while neglecting this idolatrous idealism, how to derive immense benefit from trivial forms and vulgar subjects. Aristotle, a contemporary of Aristophanes, said that the purpose of drama was to purge the passions. Others, taking up this same thought of Aristotle, say that comedy punishes us with ridicule, castigat ridendo mores. Let us generalize this double definition and say that art, in its universality—poetry, statuary, painting, music, novels, history, eloquence, as well as comedy and tragedy—has the mission of leading us to virtue and raising us from vice, sometimes by punishing, sometimes by encouraging our self-

esteem through faithful and expressive representations of ourselves, castigat pingendo mores, aut erigit. The ladder of the ideal extends from heaven to hell; and everything the imagination encounters there is the domain of the artist. Greek art ended with polytheism, with idolatry. This could not fail to happen. Civilization had been brought by it to a previously unknown degree; moral sense having weakened, it found in this same art the principal agent of its

dissolution. The end of the persecutions against the Gospel signaled its decline: catastrophe came four centuries later. In 726, under the reign of Constantine Copronymus, a council of more than three hundred bishops was assembled in Constantinople, in which the worship of images was absolutely condemned. Thus, not content with smashing ancient idols, art was smashed, forbidding the making of images even of Christ, angels, virgins, and saints. Hatred of idolatry reached even painting and statuary; the people who had shown themselves to be the most fervent worshippers of beauty were also those who, under the influence of Christian regeneration, proved themselves the most implacable destroyers of images. The iconoclastic heresy dates back a long way: it goes back through the Jews to Cambyses, Cyrus, and Zoroaster. But it was fervently espoused by the Greeks, who always saw in Christ the man of sorrows, burdened with the sins of the world, never the triumphant and transfigured Word. The Latin Church, less susceptible, rejected this rigorism, to which, however, countless sectarians, Petrobrusians, Albigensians, Waldensians, Wycliffeites, Hussites, Zwinglians, and Calvinists rallied. This was coming too late to cast stones at idols; but such was the hatred that nascent Christianity had devoted to the prince of the century, to his pomp and his works. No more than the moralist and the statesman, the artist must lose this memory. Victor Hugo once said in L'Événement: "Do you know what the socialists would do if they were the masters? They would destroy Notre-Dame, and make a lot of money from the Vendôme Column." "They would have done worse than that: they would have thrown all of Romantic literature into the fire! The parties and passions will always be the same: those who have suffered from the excesses of idealism will strike it wherever they can reach it, and in every form: it is the law of war and revolutions. What were for third-century Christians the Venuses of Praxiteles, the Jupiters and Pallases of Phidias, the Apollos and Mercurys? Badges of exploitation and misery. Once an auxiliary of liberty and

morality, now become the instrument of tyranny and debauchery, Greek art had deserved its condemnation: its works were to perish with it. What were, in 1848, for the socialists, Notre-Dame, the column, and Chateaubriand, and Lamartine? The monuments and poets of the counter-revolution. Let us therefore seek truth and justice in art as well as in politics; let us accept the law of the ideal and of capital, but subordinate it to the law of labor, and we will no longer see iconoclasts or vandals.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIDDLE AGES: Ascetic Idealism

I said earlier that the Latin Church, by allowing a certain tolerance, saved art, on the condition that it became devout. Did it demonstrate in this a true understanding of Christianity? This is a point I leave to be decided by others; all I can say, and suffice it here to recall, is that the idolatrous idealism of the Greeks was succeeded by the spiritualist and ascetic idealism of the Christians, which gave birth to Gothic art. Plato, with his theories of ideas and the ideal, had been, so to speak, the theologian of Greek art; Saint Paul, with his distinction between animal and spiritual man, and his theory of original sin, mortification, and grace, was the true inspiration for Gothic art.

Let us return to the thread of this entire genealogy.

In Egypt, art proceeded from a typical, emblematic, and zoomorphic ideal; this art was true to the environment in which it was produced and for the entire duration of the institutions of which it had become an auxiliary; it consequently received a vigorous impulse from the general thought that demanded it. But, limited to ethnographic and metaphysical generalities, abstract and disciplinary rather than aesthetic, it was susceptible, despite its long emergence, of only limited development. It was suited, I repeat, to a country, a race, a period; it could not become universal, perpetual. By its inflexible uniformity and its immobilizing tradition, it was condemned to die. Greek art set itself the mission of representing the gods, not only through types intelligible to the mind, but also in person, with visible and true features: that is to say, the Greeks aspired to represent supernatural, absolute beauty. We say the Greek type to mean the most regular, the noblest, the most ideal form of the human face. We should say the divine type; for

If there were in Greece, perhaps more than elsewhere, beautiful men and women, they were certainly far, en masse, from resembling their gods, just as the Egyptians en masse resembled the type represented by their artists. What truth Greek statuary contained therefore came much less from fidelity to the ethnic type than from a certain need of souls, tormented by the ideal, who wanted from this life to contemplate the gods as they were, face to face, sicuti erant, facie ad faciem. This divine type, once revealed by the comparison of the most beautiful models, by the scrupulous elimination of all that the human figure can retain of animal physiognomy, by the reinforcement of all the traits considered to express intelligence, character, nobility, will, majesty, justice, the work was accomplished; All that remained was to create copies: the immortal gods were to reign forever over the human race. The ideal, by nature, is as immobile as dogma; its immortality is not life, progress; Greek art, so weakly supported by its doctrine, was to disappear more quickly than Egyptian art had done.

I judge Christian art, spiritualist and ascetic, by the cathedrals and other monuments of Gothic architecture, by the statues that once populated them, some of which have been preserved; by a few pious paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; by the hymns and plainsong music. At first glance, it is easy to convince oneself that Gothic art was like Egyptian and Greek art: it was not, as the common people imagine, who can only perceive individual actions even in battle, the work of a few fortunately gifted individuals, who, solicited by cities, pontiffs, and princes, began to improvise from scratch these previously unknown marvels. Gothic was born, like Hellenic, from a need of souls; it was the product of a collective social force. When will we return from this absurd opinion which, in certain artists, poets, and writers of antiquity, shows us prodigious geniuses that exhausted nature is today powerless to produce, and whose works are inimitable for us? Genius does not appear isolated; it is not a man, it is a legion; it has its precedents, its tradition, its ideas formed and slowly accumulated, its faculties enlarged and made more energetic by the intense faith of generations; it has its companions, its currents of opinion; it does not think alone, in solitary egotism; it is a multiple soul, purified and strengthened over centuries by hereditary transmission. Certainly, we will not repeat the works of the Greek chisel, not even those of the Gothic chisel.

and Egyptian; we can now only produce copies or counterfeits, and why? Because the Greek soul is dead, as well as the Egyptian soul; because we no longer participate in its thought and feeling; because we are animated by a completely different spirit, which is only just being born and has not yet manifested itself, from an aesthetic point of view, in its collectivity. We barely know our principles, the principles of the Revolution; as for art, we are only chauvinists.

The man from the banks of the Nile strove, in his figures, to express the type; he was more concrete, more realistic, and, in this respect, more true; – the man from the islands (Greece) sought better than the type: he wanted pure, perfect, absolute beauty; he was therefore more idealistic, less concrete, and, in this respect, less true. The Christian artist cares little for beauty, insofar as it pertains only to the outward form, to the body; what he wants is the beauty of the soul, at least as understood by the Christian. This idealism is more refined than the previous one: there is progress in the three periods. Here we are ascended to the tenth heaven: this is indicated quite clearly by these immense cathedrals with their pointed spires, their slender columns, and their mysterious vaults. Everything has been said in this regard, and I will refrain from further elaboration. Faith, the spirit of compunction and charity, detachment from earthly vanities (beauties); Meditation on eternity, the practice of theological and ascetic virtues, designed more to edify than to charm, this is what the art of the Middle Ages strives to express in its figures, showing little interest in the ideality of form. The nude is abandoned, with the exception, however, of the image of the Crucified, in which faith discovers, moreover, not man, but the Paschal lamb, a host. As soon as one abandons the ideal of the figure to follow only that of the spirit, it is natural that the holiest figures revert to mere types, even portraits: what does the figure matter to someone who closes their eyes to the form and is occupied only with the sentiment of religion? This is how I found in the streets of Bruges the originals that Memling used for his famous mystical marriage of Saint Catherine. The painters of this period were not shy about finding their saintly faces; they strove to render the invisible by means of visible features, and anything was good for them in that regard. They copied the model who posed before them, in the attitude of a virgin and a martyr, adding only of their own invention, correcting and rectifying whatever might be defective, from the point of view of a lively piety, in the worldliness of the model. In a sense, Christian art, while it attached itself to the

quintessential ideal of its faith, was a return to the concrete and positive truth, forgotten.

since the Greeks. Rubens, taking his models from the beauties of Antwerp and the Campine, was, in this respect, a true realist.

To those who deny Christian art, one can simply cite the Dies iræ. Each stanza consists of three eight-syllable lines with a single rhyme. The stanzas are coupled for singing in the following manner: the first two are sung alternately by the singers and the choir, to one melody; the next two to a second melody; the following two to a third. Then, after these six stanzas, the same melodies begin again in the same order up to three times. This variety in the monotony of rhymes and singing produces the most frightening, the most painful melody ever imagined. Therefore, in the Dies iræ, the music must not be separated from the words. The last two stanzas are shortened: they each have only two lines, two rhymes, instead of three; then, after these two stanzas, a final cry in three words, without rhyme, broken time. The last accents of the cantors and choristers and the last sounds of the organ stop together, in a somber note directed at the thought of eternity; I truly know nothing, neither in the psalms, nor in the Latin, nor in the Greek, nor in the French, that is of this force: the description of the judgment is terrifying; the prayer for the deceased, with its repetitions in Hebrew, even more mournful; in the third stanza, one thinks one hears the resonance of the final trumpet through the sepulchers of the regions (without inhabitants); this line: Per sepulcra regionum, is the sublime of desolation and death. Moreover, all the principal dogmas of Christianity are summarized in this unique ode, and this is what makes it extraordinary: The end of the world, The Last Judgment, Hell and eternal bliss, The Resurrection, The gratuitousness of salvation, The terror of punishment, Infinite mercy, Salvation through Christ, his life, his passion, his death, The necessity of repentance and its efficacy with God.

Cicero, Virgil, returning to earth, would not understand a word of these words, of these strange rhymes; they would say: Voces quidem latinœ, sermo autem barbarus, ignotus.

For my part, I confess, placing myself successively from all points of view, I

One finds as much art in the Dies irae, the Lauda Sion, as in the most beautiful odes of Horace; in the statuary of the Middle Ages as in Greek.

The same causes which, after having exalted art in Egypt and Greece, determined its irrevocable fall, were to precipitate it again among the Christians. Humanity was soon to tire of this regime of penance, which would not have lasted a human age, if to ecclesiastical teaching had not been added the feudal constitution; if, while the multitude attended the mysteries, the nobility had not cultivated gay science in their castles; if, at the slightest movement that the cities made to emancipate themselves, barons and clerics had not rushed, armed with the holy inquisition, to repress them. Beauty was imprisoned; In the end, there could be no shortage of knights to deliver her. Christian art ended with the Renaissance: singularly, the papacy, by maintaining the cult of images against the heresy of Constantinople, had, so to speak, baptized it; the papacy, by making itself the patron of the new movement, celebrated its funeral.

CHAPTER VII

THE RENAISSANCE: Rehabilitation of Beauty; Ambiguous Idealism.

New Corruption

What is the Renaissance? What does this new transformation of art signify? What is its origin, its lineage, its legitimacy? Should we see in it, as many critics have claimed, nothing more than an exhumation of antiquity, a pastiche of the Greeks, an imitation, and, in short, a retrogression? The artistic evolution we have arrived at can be explained as completely as its predecessors; it appears, firstly, as we have just said, as a reaction against the asceticism of the Middle Ages, and secondly as the development of Catholic dogma itself.

Indeed, after the suffering and militant Church, conceived by the Middle Ages and its artists, was to come the triumphant Church, given by the sovereign papacy, given by the Gothic cathedrals themselves. The time of this evolution, the country where it was to blossom are indicated by its very explanation: it was in Italy, in Rome, when the triumph of the papacy was complete, that it could occur, then and there above all.

The affirmation of the triumphant Church—this is the uniqueness of the Renaissance. As for its means, it borrowed them from Greek antiquity. It had to be. Paganism infiltrated Christianity; all religions have a common foundation, the same spirit, the same goal; in short, there is only one religion. What is criticized about Italian Catholicism has happened more or less everywhere; Each people retained as much as they could, by embracing the new religion, of their ancient superstitions, their mythology, their traditions, and their gods. This can be recognized by the transformations, which are often limited to changes of name. Rome, for example, dedicated its pagan temples to the saints of the new religion; its churches, its

palaces, its monuments,

Its columns and triumphal arches are in the pure Greek style; Gothic architecture and sculpture did not penetrate southern Italy, which remained more pagan than other European countries. While the medieval church weeps, groans, and does penance in its sad and angular figures of saints, the damned, gargoyles, demons, and danses macabre, asceticism is barely indicated in southern Italy through a few paintings.

The artists of the Renaissance, from the moment they returned, in a fatal reaction against the previous era, to the cult of form and beauty, could not escape this influence. Does this mean that they were merely pagans, mere imitators of the Greeks? This judgment seems too absolute to me. Are these artists' angels reproductions of Mercury, Bacchus, or Fauns, Apollo or Adonis, Bellerophon or Perseus?

I have placed myself in the presence of the Virgins of Renaissance painters, of whom I know only a small number; and, despite all that has been said, I have not found that the Virgin of the Betrothal, the Virgin of the Chair, the Virgin of the Holy Family, Saint Cecilia, Saint Margaret, so beautiful, have anything in common with the Venuses. They are not goddesses playing a Christian comedy, as in Parny's War of the Gods; goddesses, if you will, by beauty, but even more by virtue and heroism; goddesses transformed into virgins and martyrs. – These beautiful saints, with their Christian expression, certainly seem more beautiful to me than the impassive goddesses of the Greeks… I am in love with Raphael’s saints, all holy, virgin, martyred, and clothed as they are; I am even in love with the Virgin Mary until her marriage. Yes, I am in love with this beautiful, tall young girl, imitated from Diana the huntress, and given to an old man predestined to the role of guardian angel; I am not in love with the ancient goddesses, though naked, nor with Diana, nor with Pallas, nor with Venus herself. The Madonna escapes my love only through the child she carries in her arms: it is respect for motherhood that saves her… It is a Christian dogma that the bodies of the blessed regain in heaven their clarity, beauty, agility, and subtlety. – This is the ideal to which Renaissance artists transport themselves through their imagination. They seek another expression for saints and angels, figures that are certainly not of this world. No more than Phidias could give a goddess the figure of a real, living

woman, however beautiful she might be, Raphael would not have been able to give his virgins, his martyrs, the Madonna, the physiognomies of natural people, as Memling did. – Art lovers admire the masterpieces of the latter; I doubt they would please his Bruges contemporaries as much, who

found their knowledge in his most pious paintings. – The people, even today, feel this. They say of certain perfectly pure young girls' faces: "It is the figure of a virgin"; they mean an ideal virgin, as they must be in heaven and as the artists of the Renaissance imagined them.

I have just explained the Renaissance in its historical and religious evolution, in its methods; I recognize that it has marked a place in the transformations of art whose importance cannot be disputed. But how much has its value been overestimated!… It is not possible to deny the originality of Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, Correggio. No era has produced a greater number of powerful individuals, nor raised science and craftsmanship higher. What a difference from the obscure, mostly anonymous artists of the Middle Ages! Yet the Renaissance lacked the hallmark of the great eras, the power of collectivity. In the earlier period, there was really only one school in Europe; in Italy, in the sixteenth century, as many schools as there were cities. Whatever one thinks of ascetic art, of an art hostile to the cult of form, of an antithesis of art, if I dare say so, this art is no less positive and specific; it has its reason, its character, its idea, its purpose; it has produced its monuments, just as marked by the stamp of genius as those of the Greeks. Swallowed and weeping in its figures, lame in its architecture (look at those flying buttresses, those buttresses, those gigantic piers serving as crutches for the tottering vaults), it asserted itself with as much power and more sublimity than its predecessors. The Renaissance, as genius, originality, artistic idea, remains inferior: this is because, in its development, in the vast majority of its productions, its goal was to combine the two most incompatible things: the spirituality of Christian sentiment and the ideality of Greek figures. This mixture of paganism and Christianity, beyond being presented as a fatal reaction against Catholic asceticism, has had its uses, I grant, if only to remind us of antiquity, to renew the chain of time, to form the artistic communion of the human race, and to prepare us for the Revolution. But this is nonetheless a

completely secondary task. What characterizes the art and the Renaissance period is a lack of principles, or, if you prefer, a tolerance incompatible with the ardor of any conviction. The triumphant Church has entered into its rest and its glory; it seems that the purifying era of suffering must never be repeated for it. Whether quietism or indifference, it surrounds with the same protection the

frankly pagan works and mystical conceptions. It is not angered by the licenses of Aretino, nor by the bawdy jokes of Boccaccio, nor by the more serious impieties of Rabelais. Dominant, it reflects and admires itself in all that is beautiful, serene, joyful, and happy.

The Renaissance, as the goal and end of art, manifests itself from the first day as a general dissolution. One might say that Christian art was, by nature, like the body of Christ, immune to corruption, and that Greek art emerged from its tomb in the fifteenth century only to take revenge on its rival and drag it down with it. Imagine, if possible, the voluptuousness of Epicurus or the quietism of Fénelon served by the figures of the Middle Ages. Beliefs were shaken, as John Huss and Luther proved; Art still held: this time it could not be accused of having corrupted morals. To end it all, nothing less than this exhumation of antiquity was needed, a vampire art that had fallen upon Europe at the same time as syphilis, and would only disappear with it. The artists of the Renaissance, as prodigiously talented as you like, but no longer serving either a principle or an institution, obeying only the whimsy, or rather, the hypocrisy of a society without religion or morality, having become mere counterfeiters, hastened to recreate an empyrean that no longer saddened the puny and sulky of the Middle Ages. A mixture of paganism and spirituality, their art resulted, like that of the Greeks, in the idolatrous cult of form. Raphael's Virgins, if they are not daughters of Venus, are even less daughters of compunction; the air of spirituality that reigns on their faces clashes with their beauty, with their nymph-like figures, hands, arms, and throats. Less divine, more human than the goddesses of Olympus, they inspire a feeling less pure than that felt at the sight of a Greek statue. The Venus de Milo, completely naked, is more chaste than the most respectable of Madonnas, clothed to the chin and holding the infant Jesus in her arms. There is not even the figure of Christ, the man of all sadness and all bitterness, whose

body, created for suffering, deformed by torture, resembled an earthworm, according to the words of Isaiah; There is not, I say, even this sublime figure of the Crucified that the two great artists of the Renaissance, Michelangelo and Raphael, have not profaned, giving it a renewed ideal of Jupiter and Hercules. And this Christ has become typical: popes and Jesuits have adopted him. Ask women if they are not all in love with this Christ, the most beautiful of the children of men, as we are with Saint Margaret, Saint Catherine, Saint Cecilia, and all the Madonnas. This, to say it in passing, demonstrates one thing: that the artists of the Renaissance,

The Renaissance would have been capable of repeating the work of the Greeks, so great was the weariness of asceticism at the end of the Middle Ages; so much did hearts sigh in unison for beauty; so much did they feel the need to recapture it, angel or demon, or at least to create another ideal. Unfortunately, their work has remained useless for us: this fanciful Christ, imagined so late, no more than the Ecce homo of the Middle Ages, can serve us. We are no longer devout, and we cannot be Epicurus' pigs. What can this ambiguous god do to us, men of the nineteenth century, socialist democrats, men of work, science, and progress? The rights of man were promulgated in place of the decrees of Trent and Nicaea; The Christ we need is not a mystical Christ, in the style of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, or Michelangelo, much less of Mr. Renan; he is a Christ of justice, of the caliber of Danton and Mirabeau, a revolutionary Christ.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REFORM: Art Becomes Human; Prelude to an Aesthetic Renewal

Raphael claimed that the painter's duty and rule were to represent things not as nature makes them, but as it should make them: di fare le cose non como le fa la natura, ma como ella le dovrebbe fare. I read this precept of Raphael's a long time ago, I no longer remember where; these words have remained in my memory. It is an idealistic profession of faith, in the sense of Plato and the Greeks, the clearest one can make.

The precept was followed: art everywhere became idolatrous again, a fact that is easy to judge simply by enumerating the artists' works, among which appear, in roughly equal numbers, on the one hand, Christs, Madonnas, virgins, and monks; on the other, Venuses, Bacchuses, all joyful divinities of the air, earth, and water. It is impossible to recognize oneself in this jumble of Catholicism and mythology. Since all these paintings are of the same date, by the same hand, and are supposed to express the same social thought, to respond to the same need, that all figures, by virtue of their very ideality, resemble each other, we really no longer know, when we look at a mythological painting, whether it is the Blessed of the New Testament who are celebrating carnival, nor, when we return our gaze to a painting of sanctity, whether it is the gods of Fable who are doing penance. The corruption that followed the Renaissance was due to this idealism, and Rome, that is to say, the Church, became again for the scandalized nations what it had been in the first century, the great prostitute. The Renaissance had defeated the Gothic; the Reformation, in turn, thwarted the new idolatry. What is the Reformation? In religion, it is freedom of interpretation and belief, worship in spirit and in truth, hence the death of all supernaturalist and symbolic painting and sculpture; In terms of the Church, the negation of the priesthood, the episcopate,

the papacy, no popery! In politics,

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Equality of all before the law, the abolition of castes, civic morality, the preeminence of the federal principle over the dynastic principle. After such a debacle, what remained for art? The very inevitability of elimination, the logic of things, indicates it: what remained was the common people? Secular, vulgar life and its trivial pursuits. No more symbols, no more idols, no more nobility, no more monkhood; in their place, industrious, learned, positive humanity: this is the new domain of art and upon which the ideal must be exercised. Certainly, this is a little more difficult than all the art of the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Christians, and the Renaissance combined: art that takes as its subject, material, and means the routine of ordinary life is more difficult than that which feeds on allegories, ideal forms, and beatific thoughts. But such is the law: there is no turning back. What we need is an art that is, so to speak, practical, that follows us in all our fortunes; that, relying on both fact and idea, can no longer be suddenly overwhelmed and broken by opinion; but that progresses like reason, like humanity. It is up to it to finally show us, in his dignity, too long overlooked, the man, the citizen, the scholar, the producer; It is up to him to work henceforth for the physical and moral perfection of the species, no longer through obscure hieroglyphics, erotic figures, or useless spiritualities; but through intelligent and vivid representations of ourselves; it is up to him, I say, to warn us, to praise us, to rebuke us, to make us blush, by presenting us with the mirror of our conscience. Infinite in its givenness, infinite in its development, such an art will be safe from all spontaneous corruption: it can neither decline nor perish.

There is nothing new in art, any more than in morality. The ancient Egyptians, despite their love of symbolism, represented themselves in all the conditions of their domestic and social activity; Raphael, the idealist par excellence, had a vision of art that would set him and all his contemporaries apart when he painted his famous picture of the School of Athens. But why, instead of Athens, not have taken Rome, Florence, Paris, Basel, or Amsterdam? Instead of Aristotle, Plato, Euclid, Zeno, etc., Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Giordano Bruno? I cite these names at random from chronology. Raphael would have recoiled from these actualities, which he would

perhaps have despaired of making ideal. This was precisely the difficulty that art had to overcome, and it is for having overcome it that Rembrandt's fame far exceeds that of Raphael.

Rembrandt, the Luther of painting, was, in the seventeenth century, the reformer of art. While France, Catholic and royalist, was remaking its mind, alas!

In its association with the Greeks and Latins, reformed, republican Holland inaugurated a new aesthetic. In the painting improperly called The Night Watch, Rembrandt paints, from life and original figures, a scene of municipal life, and in one fell swoop, in this masterpiece of masterpieces, he eclipses all papal ostentation, the coronations of princes, the noble tournaments, the apotheoses of the ideal. In The Anatomy Lesson, another masterpiece, where he represents Science in the guise of Professor Tulp, scalpel in hand, his eye fixed on a corpse, he puts an end to allegories, emblems, personifications and incarnations, and reconciles the ideal and reality forever. Compare Raphael's School of Athens and Rembrandt's Anatomy Lesson; consult, in the silence of your reflection, your feelings, and then say which one awakened in you the most powerful ideal, the Italian symbolic and idealist, or the Dutch positive and realist. Therefore, the most concrete painting, the most seemingly realistic, can awaken a more powerful aesthetic feeling, suggest a higher ideal, than the most idealistic painting by the greatest of masters: a word to the wise. After Rembrandt's Night Watch and The Anatomy Lesson, one can cite Van der Helst's Banquet of the Arquebusiers, and one will have a sufficient idea of what I will call the Dutch revelation. "Life, living life," says one of our most able art critics, "man, his morals, his occupations, his joys, his whims, such is the character of the Dutch school as a whole"—I add, without fear of being contradicted by the author, of the humanitarian, rational, progressive, and definitive school.—"Some have taken the citizen in action for public affairs, whether he is engaged in the exercise of arms or in the deliberation of affairs; others have taken families at home or in their external distractions; some the distinguished classes, others the working classes or the eccentric classes. Others have represented the environment where common life bustles, the seas and the beaches, with episodes of maritime existence, so dear to the country; rustic scenes and hunting scenes; canals and streams, with mills, boats, fishermen; the

cities, squares, and streets where the population circulates in all its variety. Everywhere, bustle, present life, which is also eternal life, the history of the people and the country... "Ah! It is no longer mystical art, wrapped in old superstitions, mythological art resurrecting old symbols, princely, aristocratic art, consequently exceptional, and dedicated solely to the glorification of the rulers of the human species. It is no longer the art of popes and kings, of

gods and heroes… "Among the Latin nations, art remained suspended in the air, at the double summit of the Church and the court, far above the faithful and their subjects. In Italy especially, and even in France, the land of clear, meaningful, independent literature, painting was almost always mystagogical, theological, mythological, and allegorical, or ceremonial painting, in the words of Émeric David. The dogmas and ceremonies of religion, the bacchanalia and sacrifices, the great deeds of sovereigns, the jousts and diversions of lords, the images of the gods and the great, to the exclusion of the entire nation: this is the boundary left unbroken by southern artists. In France, the French were never painted, I do not mean only the working classes, but the groups of all ranks that constitute this varied ensemble called France. » (Museums of Holland, by W. BÜRGER [THORÉ], Paris, J. Renouard, 1858).

Thus, just as the Reformation was a reaction against Roman Catholicism, so the Dutch school was a reaction against Catholic art, both that of the Renaissance and that of the Middle Ages. However, the Reformation, by its origins and by most of its sects, was iconoclastic. This was precisely what determined the revolution. Art cannot perish: driven from the temple, it had to be resurrected in the town hall and the domestic hearth; condemned in its old idealism, it was to be reborn in its positive and rational humanity. It was this radical impiety that first caused Dutch originality to be anathematized, as W. Bürger says, in Catholic countries, and, "under the pretext, sometimes of ignorance and disorder, sometimes of baseness and immorality, sometimes of fantasy and sometimes of gross materialism, here in the name of Apollo, there in the name of Christ," delayed a necessary revolution by more than two centuries.

I have associated the name of Rembrandt with that of Luther; W. Shakespeare must be placed alongside them. Shakespeare is dramatic art, literature that becomes contemporary, popular, from

the Greek and Latin, Homeric, biblical, and academic that it had remained, and that, more than ever, we French were going to make it. Such was our unfortunate destiny: by rejecting the Reformation, we broke with our national literature; We had nothing left to do but gnaw at the Greeks, the Latins, the Hebrews, only too happy that this reading, which, through its pedantry, almost drove us mad, was finally able to serve, thanks to the efforts of Boileau, Racine, Molière, Voltaire, etc., in the purgation of our souls.

Shakespeare surpassed the Dutch in all the superiority of poetry and

drama about painting. He too knew how to portray, alongside guilty, unfortunate, and poor princes, the lower classes of society. It is there that he finds his most profound words; it is through these ignoble mouths that he conveys the thought and morality of his dramas. Panurge in our country, Gil Blas and the immortal Martin in Candide are of this family. We can judge, through the works of Rabelais, Montaigne, La Fontaine, Le Sage, through the most personal works of Molière and Voltaire, what our country would have been if, as early as the sixteenth century, we had accepted the Reformation. And it bears repeating: the art that, in a gravedigger, in a rag-picker, knows how to find an aesthetic means and bring forth an ideal, is ten times more powerful than that which needs Olympian heads.

It must be admitted, however: doubt hangs over the Dutch school. Religious antagonism was not the only cause that delayed aesthetic development; and one wonders—if Rembrandt and his successors had entered the true path—how their action slowed down, how it was so little understood in their own country. The Dutch school appears today as if its period had ended; it seems to have delivered all its content: what should we make of this? Is artistic production subject to intermittence? Is national sentiment exhausted? Or could it be that Protestantism, a simple negation, could not communicate to the aesthetics it should, produce a potentiality of development that it did not possess? Such is the question to which, for the honor of principles and for the justification of the very school of which we are speaking, I believe I must give a word of answer. Artists hardly argue; philosophy, even that of art, is not their business, and the first word on aesthetics would have to be written if art had no other interpreters, from the point of view of theories, than its own masters. The thought that directed the Dutch school itself would

have taken care not to explain it: it knew nothing about it. A republican and rationalist, having nothing to do with gods or nobles, pontiffs or monks, forced to withdraw into secular life, she modestly painted modest figures, mere mortals, as they appeared at home, without ceremony, in the brasserie or in the public square: that was all. One could say that she made a virtue of necessity. Who would have suspected that this rash, ridiculous idea of depicting good people in their daily and banal occupations; of placing them on canvas, in beautiful varnished paint, in place of angels and saints, was the greatest idea that had ever entered the mind of an artist? All the more so, did anyone not think of making this idea a principle of...

social pedagogy. The Dutch genius, bourgeois and conservative, loving the down-to-earth, was not up to such a conception. Focused on himself, he did not seek to know what was happening beyond his horizon. And if some painting, escaped from the marshes of Holland, fell under the eyes of an orthodox connoisseur, the latter, upon thinking that this canvas was the work of a heretic, could not fail to find in the triviality of the figures the seal of disapproval of such art. Then, as events always moved on without the artists' thoughts being able to follow them, the school soon found itself overtaken by history; it in turn became a tradition, less than that, a monument, more difficult for critics to explain than any other. Thus, this renovating art remained unrecognized until the present day; The kind of repulsion that so many people feel today for Courbet's paintings is only the consequence of that which first attached itself to the Dutch, his predecessors and masters. "History," continues the writer I quoted earlier, "biography, criticism, and principally noble aesthetics, are in agreement, in all French books, in characterizing with supreme contempt this school, foreign to Italian rules, and which has the insolence to interpret nature with a particular sentiment. M. Fortoul in particular (the former minister of Napoleon III) has marvelously formulated this mystagogical antipathy against the very human naturalism of the Dutch school." So let us not be too surprised by what has happened. Since the Dutch were neither understood nor followed, art, in its last, fertile and incorruptible manifestation, could not become universal; In this manifestation, it remained a local thing, like the federation and liberty. In the meantime, the Jesuits gave us, with their morality, their architecture; we had the mysticism of Saint Theresa and Saint

Francis de Sales, insipid successors of Gerson's all-too-famous Imitation of Christ, the quietism of Molinos, the Amorous Torrents of Madame Guyon and the Pietist Maxims of Fénelon,4 marching alongside the gallantries of Ninon and the poisonings of Brinvilliers; the statuary of Louis XIV, with its fleshy and plump type, imitated from Madame de Montespan; the painting of Louis XV, personified in Madame de Pompadour; the literature of Crébillon, Parny and company; Finally, all the degradations of a borrowed idealism, which were excused neither by the spontaneity of origin nor by any of the qualities of nativeness.

4

Of all the writers and artists of the century of Louis XIV, Fénelon is undoubtedly the one who best demonstrates the confusion of ideas and the depravity of taste at that time. A pagan in literature; a Jesuit, feudalist, and retrograde in politics; a quietist in religion and morality; uniting in the same thought Greek idealism and the spirituality of the Middle Ages, Fénelon was neither of his time, nor of his Church, nor of his country; he possessed none of the secret aspirations of his era, no intuition of the future. He served the language and good scholarship by contributing more than anyone to transferring the beauties and grace of Greek genius into our literature; but this humanist work is not enough to constitute, in the eyes of a distinguished critic, a writer of the first order, and to assign him a place among the originals.

CHAPTER IX

FRENCH REVOLUTION: The Classics and the Romantics

The Revolution, which had been brewing for a century, finally broke out. Naturally, it did not have the leisure to concern itself with aesthetics and provide ideas for painters. Moreover, principles precede ideals; before satisfying taste, reason must be provided for. Like liberty, art is postponed until better times. The Revolution will express itself, in the meantime, as best it can; it will use the means available to it: Greek, Latin, classical, even biblical, that is, borrowed in its language, style, and forms, becoming awkward, pedantic, and declamatory. It is a symptom of ill omen for the success of the Revolution to find itself, from the very beginning, entangled in the formulas of an artificial and foreign aesthetic.

It seems like a rehearsal for a tragedy taken from ancient history. The deputies of the Third Estate are Ciceroes and Demosthenes; they pose as thunderbolts of eloquence. In the beginning, principles trump style; the French people swear only by the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. But the ideal of Lycurgus, Solon, Numa, and Plato ultimately prevails, and the national idea disappears without having had time to develop its language and forms. Mirabeau, always applauded when he thunders against despotism, is no longer understood; he arouses suspicion as soon as, after having laid out his premises, he tries to reason and talk about the constitution. Never was more sensitivity affected (aesthetics), and, in such a serious matter, was one more theatrical: from the opening of the Estates-General until 9 Thermidor, everyone becomes actor. But never was taste more false, eloquence less natural, artistic and literary inspiration more null. The only original productions of this distraught era—I am, of course, reasoning from the point of view of art and style—are La Carmagnole, Le Ça ira, Les Jurons du Père Duchêne, Le

tricolor flag and the guillotine, the image of which is found, by way of illustration, in the collections of the time. – Sometimes the people, obeying the voice of their leaders, show themselves superb in attitude; they move with majesty and indulge in effusions of patriotism drawn from the best authors; then they give in to their instinct, and we witness the most disheveled scenes: the Réveillon fire, the lantern executions, the riots at the bakers' gate, the visits to Versailles and the Tuileries, the September massacres. The Old Cordelier amuses by combining the classical style, learned at school, with the ideas of clemency that were beginning to prevail with the use of the familiar form of address and the sans-culottes of 1993. What could be more gratifying than to see this old patriot, who presided over the executions of 1992, denounced the Gironde, and instituted the revolutionary tribunal, reproach Father Duchêne for ruining the republic through exaggerated cynicism and terror? The Marseillaise is merely an amplification of rhetoric, like a harangue by Vergniaud or Robespierre. The intention was good; enthusiasm and anger bubble up; it served its purpose well: but that is all that criticism can say to its advantage. The style is artificial, emphatic, and empty, a commonplace from beginning to end. The author found neither original thoughts nor expressions, and one might doubt today, rereading this piece, whether the people who adopted it as their national anthem, and who sang it while marching against the enemy, were truly aware of themselves, whether they were ready for freedom. In this regard, I do not hesitate to say that the Chant des Travailleurs of 1848 seems to me to be of a truer, more real inspiration, and consequently of a more profound idealism than the Marseillaise.

The revolutionary tumult was succeeded by the clash of arms; with freedom lost, literature and art no longer breathed. But with the Restoration, minds were awakened, and the debate immediately began between the classicists and the romantics. What was the significance of this controversy and what was its outcome? It is important, for the understanding of the present time and the prediction of the future, that we know this.

We were tired of Greece and Rome, tired of the Revolution, of the eighteenth century, and even of the seventeenth. For twenty-five years, we had begun to study neighboring nations; comparisons had been made; beyond the classical horizon, a new world had been

glimpsed. A strange idea, the idea of an artistic and literary nationalism, had entered people's minds. Now, since, with the exception of the Constitutional Charter, dated Saint-Ouen, a summary of the Revolution, everything among us seemed to date from the Renaissance and the ancients, we wondered what we had produced of our own; in what way we were original;

What if there were a French literature, a French art? A tricky question, which aimed at nothing less than denying the legitimacy of our entire artistic and literary development since Louis XIV, not to mention since Francis I, and making us pick up the thread of our history from an unknown source. I will summarize the arguments of the two schools in a few lines. The Romantics criticized the established tradition for two things: the first, for ignoring fifteen centuries of history, which resulted in the narrowness of its thought, the lack of life, originality, and truth in its works; the second, for not even understanding its models, which plunged it into perpetual inconsistency and contradiction. Was it then for nothing, they said, that Christianity came to change the face of the world? that there was a Church, a papacy, a new Western empire associated with the Holy See, a feudal world, crusades, a chivalry; that new races replaced the old, exhausted ones on the scene; that these races gave birth, in turn, to languages, a literature, an ideal, an art; that Christianity had its revolutions, its religious wars, its great schisms; and lastly, the Revolution?... Is not all this the stuff of poetry, literature, and art, as well as pagan mythology, the siege of Troy, the Persian War, the institutions of Solon and the patriciate of Rome? And if it's poetic and artistic matter, how do you expect us to confine ourselves to the framework of your classics?... Then you don't pay attention, they added, addressing the conservatives, that with your cult of form, of classical form, that is, which constitutes your ideal, you sacrifice without reason, without necessity, EXPRESSION, no less important than form, of which form is itself only the means; you fall into convention, and consequently into monotony, falsehood, and bad taste; you lose art with your rules, your perfection, and your elegance. The ancients, out of respect for the gods, feared above all things to torment their figures; even in the paroxysm of pain, they observed the laws of ancient dignity; the gladiator had to fall gracefully; the slightest nervous or muscular contraction would have seemed to them a grimace, an offense against art. This was part of their aesthetic for a very simple

reason: it was part of their religion and their principles. But we, who today have no use for gods, we who, since the abolition of slavery, serfdom, and feudalism, no longer fear diminishing ourselves by revealing our emotions; we who seek in everything movement, action, life, color, passion, strength, who seek ourselves, and want to contemplate ourselves just as much in the fever of thought.

that in the calm of melancholy, in the vulgarity of our works, as in the fulfillment of our civic duties, we cannot accept your models, since the better we succeed in imitating them, the more ridiculous we make ourselves.

These observations were irrefutable; therefore, the classics did not respond to them. They alleged that art is absolute, universal, eternal; that its rules, which are the laws of beauty, like the rules of logic and geometry, are immutable; that the ancients practiced them all the better the better they understood them, and that it is for this reason that they bequeathed to us incomparable works; that it is with beauty as with truth and justice, which are neither susceptible of more nor less, and with regard to which it is absurd to stipulate reservations, since our duty is to approach them as closely as possible; that it is not true that there is a poetry and an art of the Greeks, a poetry and an art of the Barbarians, a literature of the ancients and a literature of the moderns; that there is only one and the same art, in which it is given to each nation to succeed more or less, in proportion to its faculties and the conditions of its existence, but without it being possible to say for that reason that there is ever a change of method, of ideal, of genre or of species; that the diversity of the subject is not sufficient to justify a difference of schools, any more than of principles; that the revolutions of history do not in any way have as corollaries a series of parallel revolutions in literature and the arts, and that this is precisely what was demonstrated by the artists of the Renaissance, equal to the Greeks; that to abandon a tradition consecrated by such long experience and so many masterpieces would be precisely to retrograde and, under the pretext of topicality, nationality, variety, movement, energy, and expression, to fall into debauchery and replace the cult of form with that of vulgarity and ugliness; that, moreover, the new school had only to testify to the truth of its criticism by the excellence of its works; that it would be judged by

the test: opere probabitur opifex. Undoubtedly, as I observed earlier, this reply did not destroy the Romantics' observations: but it also did not lack an undeniable basis of truth. The final provocation was above all dangerous to note. Romantic dramaturgy has not equaled the tragedy and comedy of the seventeenth century; and the same can be said of painting and statuary. If one were to rely on samples, it must be admitted, the cause would have been won, at least until now, for the classics. But the public, and posterity, cannot be held committed by a first

failure; and, whatever the current, positive value of each of the two rival schools, their assertions intersecting with an equal appearance of certainty, without destroying each other, there still remained to be resolved a theoretical question of the highest interest.

Indeed, if it is true that literature and art form in humanity only one great and unique evolution; that in this respect all peoples constitute a single family, all languages a single Word; that consequently a sort of catholicity or university tends to establish itself in matters of taste and art, as well as in those of science and industry; if it is still true that humanity cannot deny any of its previous manifestations; that its possessions are composed of the product of all its generations concurring in the same goal, it is certain by this very fact that the sphere of the ideal, like that of the real, is infinite; that no century can ever boast of having covered it entirely; that the ideal, varying despite its tendency towards the absolute, like reality, no idealism can maintain the claim to take precedence over others and to pose as autocrat; that our aesthetic faculty is far from finding its full and complete satisfaction in the contemplation of supposedly ideal forms or figures, and that the possession of beauty exhausts our sentiment; that the flashes of genius, the fulgurations of conscience, the explosions of heroism, passion and devotion, all manifestations of the soul, all situations, all accidents of life, are also part of our idealistic domain; that this part of ourselves, the best and the most vast, cannot, however, find its expression in an idolatrous counterfeit, since that would be to substitute one ideal for another, the Greek ideal for the modern ideal; that thus, since aesthetic reason teaches us to distinguish degrees and species in the ideal, there is reason to distinguish also in art between eras, civilizations, beliefs, languages and races; that in this respect, we French, as well as the Germans, the English and

the Scandinavians, as well as the Greeks, the Hebrews and the Hindus, have our originality; that this originality, which was revealed in the Middle Ages in the poetry of the troubadours, is also recognized in the writers who, from the sixteenth century until the Revolution, took it upon themselves to infuse us with the ideas and style of the ancients; that this assimilation, by adding to our fertility, must over time also add to our originality, so that we could boast of having had two aesthetic revelations, one in the Middle Ages, the other, so to speak, humanitarian, which must continue indefinitely.

Thus, the contradiction between the two schools would be resolved by the theory of progress and human communion, any other decision being necessarily tainted with bias. The complete artist, the one to whom the prize must be awarded, can no longer be a classicist or a romantic, nor a man of the Renaissance, Greece, or the Middle Ages; it is he who, knowing how to combine all the elements, all the givens of art, all the conceptions of the ideal, superior to tradition, will know how to best be of his time and his country. This synthesis does not appear to have been understood until today: on both sides there was reason, but on both sides also a lack of reason. Classicists and romantics could not reach an understanding. The former, who had the upper hand in studies, who occupied seats in the academies and were in a position to direct public taste, persisted in their routine and became increasingly insignificant and boring. The latter failed to clearly formulate their principles, much less to produce works superior to the ancients, as they had been ordered to do. Far from it, they proved themselves, by the nature of their predilections, just as inconsistent and retrograde as their adversaries. The Middle Ages, which were thought to have been buried in 89, with their feudalism, their castles, their cathedrals, their chivalry, their language, their morals, became fashionable again: a compromising fantasy that the legitimate monarchy would soon and cruelly atone for. Imperceptibly the romantics, poets, writers, and artists, insinuated themselves into the Academy: they had done enough for impartial judges and the bulk of the public to admit the utility of a settlement. So people began to look at each other without laughing; they borrowed from each other. The issue was not settled, since they did not agree; but the horizon seemed broadened, art and literature made freer; tired of the war, the controversy subsided. A

new decadence began.

Calculations, that of the astronomer as well as that of the bookkeeper, do not tolerate the slightest error; justice does not tolerate the slightest arbitrariness; science becomes impossible as soon as it admits fabricated facts, incomplete observations, or supernatural phenomena. Philosophy turns absurd if its series are irregularly formed, its definitions equivocal, its analyses inexact, its generalizations hypothetical. It is thus with art: the more it seeks the ideal, the more it needs precision and truth. Ambiguity, uncertainty of ideas and principles, vagueness of object, the indefinite, are antipathetic to it, preventing it from developing and living. The tacit transaction between classicism and romanticism was, like doctrinaireism in politics,

Hypocrisy. What's killing and dishonoring art right now is confusion and irrationality. This is what we will demonstrate with the most famous examples.

CHAPTER X

Confusion and Irrationality of Art during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century. David, E. Delacroix, Ingres, David (d'Angers), Rude, L. Robert, H. Vernet

I wrote in 1858: "Art is freedom itself, remaking, as it pleases and for its own glory, the phenomenality of things; executing (if you will excuse the term) variations on the concrete theme of nature.

"Art, like freedom, therefore, has man and things as its subject matter, its object to reproduce them by surpassing them, and its ultimate end is justice. "To judge the beauty of things, in other words, to idealize them, one must know the relationships between things; however, if art cannot do without this knowledge nor contradict it, it cannot replace it, nor does it explain it entirely; It also depends on another faculty, which is the very feeling of beauty and art, or more simply, taste.

"This last proposition contains all the principles of criticism in matters of art, criticism that is always arbitrary in some way. In science, in law, it is always possible to overcome sophism through logic and experience, and demonstration acquires the force of res judicata. Works of art are not appreciated only by demonstrative reason, but also by the feeling that the work awakens in the soul of the spectator, a feeling that cannot be defined, and whose only law is that it recognizes no law: De gustibus et coloribus non disputandum." » (On Justice in the Revolution and in the Church, 9th Study; Brussels edition) One can judge from this quote that the principles I profess today in matters of art, I already professed them in 1858, and that they were not invented for the purposes of this thesis. There are two things in every work of art which, in my opinion,

Reason and taste must always march together. Remove one of these two things, and art disappears. Without reason, I would even say without a profound philosophy, whether this reason be intuitive or reflective, it matters little, the work of art is reduced to nothing; there is nothing in worse taste, nothing more shocking to our aesthetic feeling, than the absurd. But conversely, without a certain power of the ideal, art, with all the reason in the world, is nothing more than science, even a craft; and since science and industry do not produce themselves in this form, since it would be pure work in vain, learned art, devoid of taste and ideal, is still absurd.

Now, since the faculties of reason and taste are not proportional to each other in any subject, Since the rationality of a work of art is not the measure of the artist's talent, nor is the rigor of reasoning a guarantee of the excellence of the critic's taste, I have made it a rule, in the judgments you are about to read, and contrary to what most writers who deal with these matters do, to insist strongly on moral and rational appreciation, of which I believe myself to be more certain, but to present only with reserve my aesthetic appreciation, which could be purely personal. 5 In this way, I will leave the reader as the final judge, entirely free to express his or her feelings, while neglecting nothing that might serve to motivate them.

DAVID When I was a student in Paris, I sometimes went on Sundays to visit the Louvre. There I almost always stopped for a few moments in front of Leonidas at Thermopylae. I loved, I confess, this heroic painting; I felt a sigh rise in my chest, my eyes become moist, in the presence of this calm Leonidas, saying to his three hundred Spartans: Tonight, we will have supper at Pluto's. I watched with religious emotion these beautiful warriors, full of sacred enthusiasm, engraving with the tips of their swords, on the rock at the foot of which they were about to sacrifice their lives, this simple and sublime epitaph: Passerby, go tell Lacedaemon that we died here to obey her laws. Later, I heard this work of David, a perfect example of the classical or academic genre, denigrated. But what do these epithets prove, I asked myself? What would the most skillful romantic have done here, in David's place? Doesn't art, as David's critics understand it, aim at the idealized representation of man? And when this representation produces an effect similar to the one I experience, doesn't

Can we not say that the artist achieved his goal, that he rose to the summit of art? Classical means conforming to Greek tradition. And why not? So much the better for the Greeks if, after more than two thousand years, the works of their artists serve as a model for us, just as the patriotism of their warriors serves as an example. Also, did this painting not come at the right time, during our great revolutionary era? Classical or not, are there many painters today of David's strength? Would our generation be capable of inspiring them, of producing works of such value...?

Such was my feeling, which I give for what it's worth, and which I leave to each master to appreciate according to his personal taste.

Later, when the impression had subsided, doubts arose in me, which gradually took shape in the following review.

Undoubtedly the fundamental idea of the painting, devotion to one's country, is excellent, and the undertaking was timely. But why choose this subject of Leonidas? Such a painting, certainly very good as an illustration of Herodotus's story, suitable for edifying a rhetoric student who knows Greek, is nonetheless irrational, false in itself, and in more than one respect. First of all, it means nothing to the people called upon to contemplate it, who not only do not know Greek, have never read Herodotus, are unaware of the King of Persia's quarrels with the Hellenes, but are also absolutely incapable of understanding why these warriors are completely naked, except for their heads, armed with helmets; why the painter made them such beautiful bodies and faces that one would take them for angels stripped of their wings: why also they all look alike. Greek history, Greek type, Greek nudity, as befits the athletes and gods of Greece, Greek inscription and all Greek; this may be very pleasant for a Hellenist, an archaeologist, but what does it matter to the Parisians of 1838?... So I was always alone in contemplating the Leonidas. Then, abandoning myself more and more to the flow of my ideas, I said to myself again that it was unfortunate that Greek artists, contemporaries of the Persian War, less preoccupied with temples, processions, sacrifices, less devoted to their gods and more grateful to their citizens, had not left us, on marble or canvas, a representation of the defense of Thermopylae; that such a painting would interest us today in a much different way than that of David; that we would at least find in it the truth of the period, the country, the costumes, and the figures; that patriotic sentiment would

doubtless have lost nothing, and art no more. It is true that in the spirit of Greek religion and customs, this apotheosis of the three hundred Spartans through painting or statuary would have seemed...

an insult to the gods, to whom alone victory should be attributed; one would have feared, after having obtained their protection, to attract their wrath. All the more reason why a nineteenth-century artist should not have undertaken to confer on the companions of Leonidas this solemn immortality. Instead of repairing an oversight of the Greeks, history was once again lacking. Will it be said as an excuse that it is neither Leonidas and his Spartans, nor the Greeks and the Persians that should be seen in this great composition: that it is the enthusiasm of 92 that the painter had in mind, and republican France saved from the coalition? But what is the purpose of this allegory? What is the need to pass through the defile of Thermopylae and retrograde twenty-three centuries to reach the hearts of the French? Didn't we have our heroes, our victories?... In any case, David's conception, subjected to rational criticism, appears decidedly false; now, as soon as an artistic conception is recognized as false, the execution, even the most correct, no longer affects us; it's pointless to consider in what way it might be defective.

The assessment I have just made of Leonidas can be applied to most of the paintings by the same master: The Oath of the Horatii, The Sabine Women, Brutus and His Sons, Belisarius. David, I do not hesitate to acknowledge, was truthful in his paintings, and his testimony is true. The French Revolution was partly the work of the Greeks and the Romans; it was only right that David should show them, in our name, the recognition they deserved. I nevertheless persist in saying: All this painting, which presents itself as serious, is conjectural, given the subjects, which have nothing national about them and can only interest educated amateurs; it is illustrative painting, good for inclusion in works intended to be given as prizes to colleges. And, generalizing all these observations, we must conclude that any historical painting, representing an action of which the artist was not a witness, of which he is not even contemporary, and of which the mass of his public is ignorant, is a phantasmagoria, and, from the point of view of the high mission of art, nonsense. I love, I confess, the beautiful engravings of the

history of Alexander based on Lebrun's paintings: but for me, it's a matter of curiosity, and to a certain extent of archaeology: such prints, when done with care and intelligence, are, like the Antiquities of Montfaucon, a way of interesting children in the history and customs of ancient peoples; man, having reached maturity, loves, by revisiting the lessons of his early years, to rejoice in the admirations of his youth. Beyond that, I declare that neither Lebrun, nor David, nor any other of the same kind, could interest me, and that I would not bother.

no more for a Crossing of the Rubicon than for a Tête-à-tête between Paris and Helen.

David not only painted ancient history, he also painted modern history. Let us cite, among others, the First Consul Climbing the Saint Bernard; the Oath of the Tennis Court; and Marat Expiring. The first of these paintings esteems flattery, which betrays the artist's emphatic-allegorical habits of mind, and which is painful to see when one recalls his republican antecedents. What! It is David the Maratist, the terrorist, who gives consular France this example of adulation, and who makes the usurper of Brumaire, the more fortunate than skillful victor of Marengo, a kind of archangel, mounted on a divine steed, and leaping across the Alps, for the salvation and freedom of the fatherland! In David's painting, Bonaparte is depicted, in the painter's words, calm on a fiery horse; the wind lifts his cloak, as if Fortune herself were carrying it; he is alone; alone, he fills the picture, as if the destiny of this providential figure were summed up in the destiny of the nation. Before the immensity of this man, the Alps seem to sink and shrink to the size of a molehill. As we can see, David has done everything he could to idealize his hero; there is even a certain romanticism. The truth, according to M. Thiers, is that General Bonaparte crossed the Alps in the rearguard of his army, mounted on a mountain mule, whose feet were much surer than those of a stallion from the consular stables, wrapped in a common gray frock coat, and consumed with worry at the news he had just received that the army was stopped at the descent of the Alps, in a narrow gorge, by an impregnable fortress that barred its path. The fact had remained relatively little known until the publication of M. Thiers's history. But it must be admitted that on the part of a commander-in-chief, who had been making his preparations for six months, who had had

to study the map of the country and who had flattered himself that he would surprise the Austrians, the error was enormous. Bonaparte was ignorant even of the name and existence of the fort of Bard; He had not in the least suspected that his army, after crossing the crest of the Alps, could find itself trapped as if in a mousetrap; so that if General Mélas had been able to suppose that his adversary would enter this defile, with a reinforcement of a few thousand men, he would have taken the French army prisoner. They finally succeeded, not in removing, but in circumventing the obstacle; victory won, not with cannon fire, but with pike blows. The army got off with a fright: but what a source of glory for the general, this setback!... Nothing irritates me more than lies in art. Precisely because...

Art is an idealization; the artist's idea must be all the more scrupulous in its truth. David's painting of the First Consul climbing the Alps is certainly very beautiful: it is nonetheless a page I would like to tear out. Politicians attribute to the Treaty of Tilsit the apogee of imperial power, and to the Bayonne Conferences the beginning of decadence. Reasoning in turn from the point of view of aesthetics and morality, I would find the secret principle of this decadence in the disorderly flattery that greeted the First Consul on his return from Marengo, and of which the painter David made himself the interpreter. Empires do not subsist solely on the prudence of princes; they live above all on the dignity of nations. When history is written, no longer apologetic, but critical of the Consulate and the Empire, the Marengo campaign, however successful it was in its political consequences and the peace that crowned it, will ultimately be judged as one of the most unfortunate for Napoleon's personal glory, and, sad to say, as a veritable eclipse of the good sense and civic spirit of the French. The First Consul committed error after error, and owed his salvation only to circumstances beyond his control. Ignorance of Fort Bard, where he almost found himself captured in the most foolish way possible: six days lost in Milan, doing nothing, while the Genoa garrison lived on boot stalks and rats; Masséna and his army sacrificed against military duty, which prescribed, above all, to rescue him, and forced, after the most heroic defense, to capitulate; The flaw in the campaign plan, consisting of dispersing the army in order to surround General Mélas, as if by a network. He first deceived Bonaparte by stealing his march, then broke through the network,

won the First Consul the First Battle of Marengo, and only succumbed to Desaix's blows at the second. This was the case, for public opinion, to bring the Citizen First Consul back to more modest ideas: by having him earn his title of Emperor through fifteen years of service, there was reason to believe that he would have needed at least thirty to lose it; the most cowardly flattery, in concert with unbridled ambition, decided otherwise.

What! you say, so much in a painting! So much importance to the error of an artist!... Eh! Yes: do you then find that this is exaggerating the importance of art? Have we not said that art, like literature, is the expression of society, and that if it does not exist for its perfection, it exists for its ruin? Let us not treat these things lightly: that would be adding imbecility to corruption.

The Tennis Court Oath was never completed. I don't know where this painting is, and I don't remember ever seeing it; I can therefore only speak of it from the engraving, like everyone else. That's enough for me for the moment. The day of June 20, 1789, was certainly one of the greatest and most decisive of the Revolution. All the deputies, minus one, after declaring themselves the National Assembly, swore with Bailly not to separate until they had given France a constitution. There are very few French people who, reading the account of this day in historians, do not share the enthusiasm of the representatives and who do not consequently applaud David's work, perhaps the most considerable to have come from his mind. Yes, this is what our fathers were in 1789, what they wanted; and we, their posterity, have not refused them our ratification. Yet doubt hangs over this great act, a doubt that the artist has rendered with incomparable eloquence, but which, affecting the morality of the act, reflects on the composition. At the distance we are from the facts and in view of the events that resulted from them, one wonders if the approach of the deputies of the Third Estate was well reasoned; if it was useful; if the assembly, composed largely of lawyers, and which until that moment prided itself on observing the strictest legality, did not deviate from it by taking this insurrectional oath; if the subsequent course of the Revolution was not affected by it, to the point of making us regret today that another route was not followed. Is it certain that this deputy, seated while his colleagues, standing, their arms outstretched towards Bailly, took the fateful oath, was not right

alone against all? MARTIN (from Auch), that is the name of this deputy, if I remember correctly, whose isolated protest the painter David took care to record, as a testimony to respect for opinions, appears here as remorse in the heart of the national conscience. The deputies swore not to separate until they had given a constitution to France: they kept their oath. On September 3, 1791, this constitution, sworn by the king, was promulgated. It did not last a year! After that, we successively had the constitutions of 1893, 1895, 1899, 1804, 1814, 1815, 1830, 1848, and 1852, together TEN constitutions, whose average duration, to date, has been a little over seven years!... Add that the national decadence of which the old system was accused in 1789, has, under liberal guise, only continued, according to the testimony of the revolutionaries who were fortunate enough to witness it, Barrère, Lafayette, etc. Was it worth becoming impatient, separating ourselves from royalty, abandoning the path indicated for thirteen years by Turgot and Necker, to throw ourselves into this interminable conspiracy? In 1889, the majority of the nation applauded the Oath of the Game of

palm and finds Martin (d'Auch) wrong; but this same majority, if you question it after January 21, 1993, during the Terror, during the coups d'état of the Directory, and up until the liquidation of Ramel, it finds him right. Later, under the Consulate and the Empire, from 1799 to 1808, it will again find Martin (d'Auch) wrong; but the disaster in Russia, the invasion, the Restoration will find him right for the second time; and if 1830 and 1848 still pronounce against him, 1852 soon rises in his favor. Thus, the Tennis Court Oath is a fact about which one can say that the majority's opinion changes every ten or fifteen years. What opinion can we form, based on this, of an artistic composition intended to celebrate this same fact? Let us reflect on this, and we will see that, in this respect, the Tennis Court Oath has something suspicious about it that troubles the mind and leaves no clear impression. Are these rioters we see, or the founders of liberty, the fathers of the Revolution? Who can say? Most will perish on the scaffold, emigrate, or rally to a new despotism. The great flaw in David's work is, I repeat, that it raises an insoluble doubt; that the figures appear entirely different, depending on whether they are considered from the point of view of approval or blame; it is that the artist was not aware of this doubt, because if he had been aware of it, his duty would have been to devote all his attention to it: which would have

made his composition a unique work.

The Dying Marat is a flash of lightning in the stormy night of the Revolution. I don't know, for my part, what kind of criticism could be made of this picture, where the author had only to reproduce reality as he saw it an hour after the event, to achieve the highest degree of pathos and the greatest depth of idea. Whatever one thinks of Marat, the Friend of the People, I leave it to his enemies and don't even bother with it. What remains true and what dismays me is that this corpse will become the signal for the Terror; that everything here seems to have been combined by an infernal genius to excite pity and anger in the multitude, and to provide the schemers and scoundrels of the Revolution with a pretext for every plot. This popular journalist living in a cellar; this exhausted body in the service of the sans-culottes; this poor dwelling with its cold walls; This murder of a sick man in the bath where, a restless worker, he had just corrected his last proof; this sad revenge of a powerless party at the hands of an elegant aristocrat; this Marat, finally, yesterday a monster, today a martyr, a saint: this is what art could not have invented, and what the political madness of a woman threw, impromptu, onto David's classical palette! If, from 1893 to 1814, the public and artists had been capable of something...

On reflection, they would have seen, in this painting of Marat's death, the flame that showed them the way; the Dutch school, which produced more accomplished works, having left nothing of this force.

EUGÈNE DELACROIX Head of the Romantic school, as David had been of the Classical school, Eugène Delacroix is one of the greatest artists of the first half of the nineteenth century. He would have had no equal, and his name would have reached the highest degree of fame, if, to his passion for art and greatness of talent, he had joined clarity of idea. I previously reported (Chapter III) E. Delacroix's definition of the ideal; It is unintelligible: all that can be grasped is that Delacroix called ideal everything that struck his imagination, and which he, in turn, tried to strike the imagination of the spectator with the help of his brush. Which amounts to saying that the ideal, according to E. Delacroix, is a personal impression of the artist, and art an expression of his subjectivity. – He also said: “Painting is nothing other than the art of producing illusion in the

mind of the spectator, by passing through his eyes." This proposition is no clearer than the other; but we can still distinguish this: that the painter is a magician who creates illusions for people. The way in which he explained his Romanticism amounts to this: "If by my Romanticism one understands the free manifestation of my personal impressions, I must confess that I have been a Romantic since the age of fifteen." "But, artist," I will reply to M. Delacroix, "I care very little for your personal impressions, not to mention that I defy you to produce in me the slightest illusion, unless you discover the secret of making my imagination an accomplice of yours. Now, to train my imagination, the first condition, I warn you, is to win my reason. It is therefore not through your own ideas and your own ideal that you must act on my mind, passing through my eyes; it is with the help of the ideas and the ideal that are in me: which is just the opposite of what you boast of doing. So that all your talent, as a painter, like the talent of the poet, is reduced first, and before setting to work, to penetrating our souls, to discovering the ideal there; then to exciting it, to provoking it by means of your artist's mirror; Finally, to produce in us impressions, movements, and resolutions that benefit, not your glory or your fortune, but the general happiness and improvement of the species.

I said it somewhere: poets and artists are in humanity like cantors in church or drummers in the regiment. What we ask of them is not their personal impressions, it's ours; it is not for themselves that they paint, sing, or play their instruments, it is for us. From which it follows that what makes them admired and applauded, what makes them famous, does not come from them; they are only their faithful and resounding echoes; what creates the miracles of poetry and art is the idealistic faculty, not of an individual, but of a collective. If this obedience displeases artists, if they claim to sing and paint for their own particular benefit and for their own glory, we do not prevent them from doing so; only, they should not be surprised to find themselves abandoned and left to listen to themselves in the desert. A few amateurs on their side may perhaps offer them the alms of a compliment; the multitude will pass them by without noticing them, and they will fade into oblivion. This is what happened to E. Delacroix, whose personal impressions filled him with bitterness, and who, by following his own inspiration, missed out on the finest career ever offered to an artist. "Delacroix," says one of his biographers, "conquered the salons and won over

ministers more by his wit than by his works. In him, the man of the world saved the artist." Unfairly praised by his best friends, insulted by his enemies, he felt misunderstood, unappreciated, out of step with his time, and found no refuge from the more or less well-founded judgments of his contemporaries except in his uncertain awareness of his talent and the melancholy of his illusions… “At an exhibition of paintings by Madame la Duchesse d’Orléans, people who didn’t know him laughed in his presence at his best works: ‘For more than thirty years,’ he said, his face pale and his voice trembling, ‘I’ve been given over to the beasts.’ M. Vitet, of the Académie Française, compared Delacroix to M. d’Arlincourt; Lamartine, a blind poet, innocently attributed to him some poor paintings by M. Vinchon and overwhelmed him with praise. A journalist dared to write: M. Delacroix paints with a drunken broom. » (French Artists, by TH. SYLVESTRE) What dominates E. Delacroix and constitutes his personality is an unquenchable thirst for emotion, passion, and color; a need for energy and movement that drove him, a man of frail temperament and delicate constitution, a diligent worker who almost never left his studio, to exaggerate in his paintings the qualities he did not encounter to the same degree in classical works. I do not wish to establish myself here as a judge between the two schools: classical wisdom and pose bore me; energy, often affected,

superficial, and which is one of the characteristics of our cowardly and corrupt era, annoys me no less; but who does not see here that Delacroix, who made his Romanticism consist in the manifestation of his personal impressions, who defined painting as the art of creating illusions for the spectator, and the ideal as everything that suited his own idea, Delacroix, reduced the reform of art, of which he was the standard-bearer, to a simple difference in the means of execution, when it should have been sought above all in the depths of ideas, in the consciousness of the century, in the state of society?

So what is happening? This is because, apart from the pathos of expression, the energy of movement, the intimate violence of the figures, the effects of light, the lavishness of description, the strangeness of the scenes, which also characterize the painters and writers of the Romantic school, and which constitute their manner or style, Delacroix does nothing other than what the classics did before him and still do; he adapts to all subjects, except to treat

them according to his personal impression: ancient history, mythology, biblical and religious subjects, fairy tales and novels, scenes from contemporary life, everything suits him. He paints indifferently the Justice of Trajan, the Battle of Nancy or that of Taillebourg, the Death of Sardanapalus, the Last Words of Marcus Aurelius, the Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople; – or Christ on the Cross, the Raising of Lazarus, the Disciples of Emmaus, Jesus during the Storm, Michael slaying the Devil, Jacob's Wrestling, Heliodorus driven from the temple by two angels, Saint Sebastian; – or Hamlet and Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, Othello, Faust, Margaret and Mephistopheles, the Sibyl, the Farewell of Romeo and Juliet, Medea Furious, the ceiling of Apollo. – or finally a Jewish Wedding in Morocco, the Insurgents on a Barricade, Muley-Abderrhaman, Boissy d'Anglas, the Massacre of Scio, etc. "Delacroix," you tell me, "is above all the man of our time, full of moral illnesses, betrayed hopes, sarcasm, anger, and tears. » Good news: Delacroix is a stand-in for Lord Byron, Lamartine, V. Hugo, G. Sand; the illustrator of Goethe and Shakespeare. But what do all these ranters and crybabies have to do with me? What does it matter to me that Mr. Delacroix has developed a different way of painting than Mr. Ingres, if it's always the same world he represents, the same figures he makes grimace? What, good God! can all this scrambling do me any good? Am I even sure that an artist who spends three-quarters of his life gazing in his imagination at the figures of Jacob, Sardanapalus, Marcus Aurelius, Lazarus, or Mephistopheles, will have truly seen the living people he has observed in the most

interesting stories of their lives? Certainly, A Jewish Wedding in Morocco has something to please me; The Insurgents attracts me even more; Anglas's Boissy even more. I am already wary of The Massacre of Scio. But, once again, this man who sees beyond the centuries, who frequents the invisible world, who inhabits the supernatural, who poses Shakespeare's heroes before him, is he capable of properly observing and understanding what is happening around him? Does he understand my idea, does he sense my ideal, does he grasp my impression, a layman, whose work is above all to interest, to move, and whose approval is sought? Four-fifths of Delacroix's work is pure nonsense: the other fifth remains dubious and suspect. And look, here is Anglas's Boissy: the author, with his usual energy, has well rendered the tumult of the scene, the fury of the riot, the terror of the assembly, the admirable constancy of the

president. The way in which Féraud's head is presented on the end of a long pike leaves something to be desired: the ridiculous here borders on the atrocious. But what the painter did not see, and which makes his sketch, in which the cause of the people is completely ignored and sacrificed, an injustice of art, is that the Prairial insurrection was provoked by the Thermidorian reaction; that if, on that deplorable day, legality was for the Convention, one cannot say that law was against the people; that the deputies who supported the riot were at least as honest people as the conservative deputy Féraud; and that the four heads that fell, a few days later, on the moderates' guillotine, paid four times as much for the one cut off by the blind anger of the masses. This is what it was the artist's duty to understand and convey, it is not for me to say how; this is what Delacroix's painting conceals, and what casts the same shadow over this work, what produces the same impression of doubt and discontent that we criticized above in David's Oath of the Tennis Court. It is true that Delacroix, the son of a member of the Convention who, according to his biographer, made only a leap from the Terror to the Empire, was concerned only with his personal impression; but on the spectator who is not of his party, what illusion did he produce? M. INGRES M. Ingres is accused of plundering his works. This is not surprising, and it is not his fault. He who, banishing all ideas from art, attaches himself exclusively to form and pursues the absolute, locks himself into a circle that, tightening ever more, will ultimately allow him to see, in the infinite variety of models, only one and the same type, which his ambition will be to reproduce forever.

In this regard, the classics and the romantics, but by two opposing methods, the former by the absolute, the latter by fantasy or personal impression, arrive at the same result, which is irrationality. – "M. Ingres spent his life, sometimes repeating the same forms, as if to destroy the variety of nature; sometimes insidiously combining the most famous types of tradition with the living model. What an amalgam of natural and artificial features! And how unscrupulously he plunders the statues, bas-reliefs, engraved stones, antique cameos, frescoes, vases, utensils from Herculaneum and Pompeii, the paintings, prints, mosaics, and tombs of Italy!" Stupid work, which naturally excludes imagination, verve, originality, and reduces art, briefly affirmed by the first masters, to a simple task of copying and practicing. In this respect, there are no artists who

have been as mistreated by critics as M. Ingres: how then did he acquire this immense reputation which, after opening the Institute for him, brought him to the Senate? The reason, in my opinion, is that our aesthetic education is yet to be completed; that after having lost the Christian sentiment which inspired the Middle Ages, we have remained in the paganism of the Renaissance, and that outside of our own portraits, we find nothing more beautiful than goddesses naked or dressed as Madonnas, gods naked or dressed as apostles, martyrs, or Alexanders. Now, lie for lie, fantasy for fantasy, the common curious, like Capuchins and devout women, will always prefer a beautiful, amiable Saint Symphorien, in the style of Ingres, to a Christ sweating blood and water, according to the ideas of the fourteenth century.

I remember going to see, some twenty-five years ago, in one of the lower rooms of the Institute, a Virgin at Communion by M. Ingres: this painting, it was said, was intended for the Emperor of Russia, Nicholas. It was a very pretty person, in adoration before the chalice and the host, symbols of Greek communion, and perfectly fulfilling, in her communicant's pose and her attitude of a Virgin-Mother, her mystical role. She reminded me, except for the few years she might have been older, of those lovely young girls of twelve or thirteen years old who used to be seen at Corpus Christi processions, dressed as Madonnas, penitents, or nuns. An imperceptible smile of satisfaction spread across that charming face, which seemed to say quietly, as she took the consecrated species: "And yet it was I who made you, O blessed God, and who made you all by myself!"... Where had M. Ingres gotten that head from? Apparently, he had wanted to express the thought that must have agitated the mother of Christ when, after the resurrection, shut up in the Cenacle,

With the apostles, she received the Eucharist for the first time from the hands of the head of the Church, Peter, according to the institution made by his divine son; and he had succeeded, like the true pagan that he is. Why, faithful to history, had he not at least given the Mother of God, now of seven joys, the age of fifty? Why this delightful novice, true sister of the Odalisque and the Venus Anadyomene? Who ever had the idea of such a Our Lady, mother of a thirty-four-year-old Messiah? Never had a devotional painting produced such an effect. M. Ingres had painted the Mother of God

as he did his Circassians: for that one as for these, he chose the prettiest female figure he could find, thinking to honor divine maternity, in the same way that he paid homage to Voluptuousness. The poor man, with his Greek ideal in his mind, could not have imagined anything better. The fault lay with Czar Nicholas, who had commissioned it. What an idea, in the nineteenth century, to ask a zealot of form, an idolater, for a painting of the Virgin Mary making her First Communion at the age of fifty! I, too, thought then that M. Ingres's Madonna was delicious. By Jove! That's the only praise I've heard of it. But I say today that such a work is the most absurd thing one can imagine; that it is neither Christian nor Greek painting; that he mocked the Czar by sending him this Jesuitical masquerade. that if Raphael's virgins, far superior to those of M. Ingres, were able to gain acceptance in a century that was both Epicurean and bigoted, they could no longer be tolerated today; and that from every point of view, from the point of view of Christian piety, as from that of art, as from that of morality, these lewd mysticisms are simply worthy of the flames.

A single painting like Géricault's The Shipwreck of the Medusa, coming a quarter of a century after David's The Dying Marat, redeems a whole gallery of Madonnas, odalisques, apotheoses, and Symphorian saints; it is enough to indicate the path of art through the generations, and allows us to wait. DAVID (D'ANGERS) AND RUDE I have grouped these two names in the same article because of the analogy between the monuments, the Pantheon and the Arc de Triomphe, on which David (d'Angers) and Rude inscribed their names, and because of the thinking that inspired them both. The observations I have to make on these two artists are of the same nature as those I have already made on David the painter: they consist, not in denying or contesting the talent, which was great in all three, but in demonstrating

the irrationality of conceptions. It must be, in my opinion, a great source of encouragement for our young artists, seeing that genius has been expended over the past sixty years producing false works, to think of the success that promises to reward their efforts, the day they work with a reasoned awareness of art and the certainty of being in tune with their times. It was by virtue of a decree of the Constituent Assembly, dated April 4, 1791, that the church of Sainte-Geneviève, built by Soufflot, on the model of Saint Peter's in

Rome, became the Panthéon and served as a tomb for great men. So, the shepherdess of Nanterre has been stripped of her patronage, and the second cathedral of Paris has been transformed into a quasi-pagan temple. These changes in the purpose of monuments are not rare in the history of architecture: necessity knows no law. But except in cases of necessity, says the catechism, holy water must be used, and I wonder if, from an artistic point of view, such transformations can be accepted. If someone had said to an artist in 1791: We want a temple of great men, serving as a burial place, ex aequo, for all those whom public recognition will bring there between now and the end of time, do we believe that he would have given this temple the form of the church of Sainte-Geneviève? A Christian church, Gothic or not, implies a certain layout that is appropriate only for it: it is in the form of a cross, which makes no sense in a temple of Glory; and the dome, which rises over the central part, symbolizing religious aspiration and the protection of Heaven over the faithful, is also the most imaginable contrary to the principle of equality that this temple must express, equality in grandeur and in death. The dome of St. Peter's in Rome commands urbi et orbi: take away from it this Catholic significance, this thought of universality; make it a Prytaneum for Roman citizens who have served their country well, and St. Peter's, the greatest, the most magnificent church in Christendom, will be absurd. There is yet another reason for incompatibility: each church, by virtue of its consecration under the invocation of a saint, has received a precise, definitive character, which excludes any new accession: it is the opposite of a pantheon, or a temple honoring great men, who are supposed to enter it for centuries to come. A pantheon can never be finished: there must always be room for new altars; perpetuity is its fundamental characteristic. The character of Christian churches, on the contrary, is individuality, with regard to the saint adopted as patron, and eternity, with regard to religious thought. The transformation of the church of Sainte-Geneviève into a pantheon was therefore aesthetically puerile, ridiculous. I also dislike the name Pantheon, a revival of polytheism.

imperial, as one might say: To all the gods over whom Rome commands, and of whom Caesar is the chief. But since the word is Greek and is interpreted by the universality of great men past, present, and future, let us move on. What is a great man? Are there great men? Can we admit, in the principles of the French

Revolution and in a republic founded on human rights, that they exist? Along with human rights, we have recognized progress as the principle of the new society. Now, one of the effects of progress in a homogeneous, democratically organized society is that the distance between man and man will ever close, as the masses advance along the path of science, art, and law. In the thinking of the Revolution and in the perspective of the republic, the idea of great men is therefore nonsense; Their disappearance is one of the guarantees of our deliverance. Those in the Constituent Assembly who decreed the Pantheon, and those in the Convention who placed Lepelletier and Marat there, were outspoken aristocrats: unless they implied that one day the entire people would enter it; in which case it would have been simpler to leave us beneath the starry vault of the sky.

The inscription on the frontispiece of the Pantheon is no less open to criticism: To great men the grateful Fatherland! What! It is the Fatherland now that is grateful to its men, to its children! I would have thought it should be precisely the opposite: To the Fatherland its great grateful men! Believe then in the freedom of a people who, from the first day of their emancipation, commit such misinterpretations. I abhor ostracism: I believe that the law is sufficient to protect the republic against the insurrection of the small and the usurpation of the great. The law, nothing but the law. A people who believe they can guarantee their freedom only by successively exiling their most capable citizens, who have served them best, proves by that alone that they are unworthy of freedom. But the recognition of the Fatherland towards great men! A recognition passed into state law, consecrated by a public cult! I confess, I prefer ostracism even more. Assuming that following a new revolution, the church of Sainte-Geneviève becomes the Pantheon again, I ask that at the very least this offensive, insulting inscription be erased.

After this criticism of the Pantheon monument, I will have little to say about the frontispiece sculpted by David (d'Angers). Even if it had been Mr. Ingres, an artist indifferent to ideas, who had done it! But David (d'Angers) was a republican, and, like his namesake, a supporter of Robespierre. How, in the absence of a

A superior art intelligence, was he not warned by his democratic

conscience? How did he not see that the idea he was charged with translating clashed with his principles and with the monument? How did he not feel that, since everything was false in the thought that dictated the decree of April 4, 1791, he himself could only produce a false work? What is this allegorical HOMELAND gratefully distributing crowns to the bravest of its children? What! We have overthrown feudalism, superstition, divine right, all this only to fall immediately back into Greek idolatry and Egyptian semiography! And you call that progress! These dozen figures accompanied by naked little children, that's the elite of France! En dii tui, Israel! – VOLTAIRE: He hasn't fallen too far, in the eighty-five years since the Parisians proclaimed him, in the middle of the theater, a great man and immortal, and I confess that I like him very much. But it must also be said that in a host of respects, he's beginning to seem odd to us, and that if we weren't careful to measure him by the standard of the eighteenth century, which is the king's foot, he would seem to us of rather mediocre stature. – ROUSSEAU: I repudiate him; that cracked head is not French, and we could have done very well without his lessons. It is precisely with him that our romanticism and our absurd democracy begin. To each fatherland its great men, if you please; to each commune its poor. It's impertinent, Citizen David, when you can't find twelve well-known French figures to place in our sublime Pantheon, and then stuff a foreigner there, three-quarters of whose reputation is due to our frivolity. Why, once in the process of making exceptions in favor of foreigners who, through their writings, have illustrated our language, didn't you place Count Joseph de Maistre next to J. J. Rousseau?... - FÉNELON: Come on! This quietist, this feudalist, this friend of the Jesuits, whom Saint-Simon and others portray as a court intriguer! The image of Fénelon called forth that of Bossuet: why this forgetfulness of the Bishop of Meaux, ten times greater than the Archbishop of Cambrai?... It's pointless for me to continue. The decree that established the Pantheon was one of the thousand follies of the Revolution; The frontispiece is a partisan work, without originality, without truth, without grandeur, which will have to be detached from the temple, just like the inscription, the day when France recovers, with freedom, its common sense. As for the Pantheon itself, returned to Catholic worship at the return of the Bourbons, then restored to the great men after the July Revolution, then once again a Christian church after the coup d'état, and which today performs no service, neither sacred nor profane, since it does not serve as a parish,

I have no quarrel with it: let it be turned, if you wish, into a fodder store. What I have just said about David (of Angers) and the Pantheon proves one thing, namely, that when it comes to a public, institutional, commemorative monument, art must above all preserve the character of the era, be national, current, concrete, express the ideas of the time, and speak the language of the country. Is not the inscription on the July Column worth more, in its official simplicity, than all the emphatic inscriptions, crafted in beautiful Latin, in honor of Louis XIV? In memory of the citizens who armed themselves and fought to defend public liberties on the memorable days of July 27, 28, and 29, 1830. This tumulus style, in my opinion, achieves the perfection of the genre. There is no declamation here, no insult to the fallen dynasty. The July Revolution, with its consequences, is left to the judgment of posterity. Only one thing is attested, and this thing is true, and because it is true, it moves us: that on July 27, 1830, public freedoms were in peril, and that citizens armed themselves and fought for them. I don't know what influence inspired this writing; whoever its authors may have been, they succeeded perhaps beyond their hopes. As for the Genie surmounting the column, an essentially impersonal symbol of freedom and immortality, we can accept it: it is of all parties as of all religions: it hovers over the living and the dead, over the victors as well as the vanquished. I can't imagine what could have been put in its place. Were these principles followed in the execution of the Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile? No, and this is what makes this monument, at least for the main groups in the lower section, a kind of enigma. I willingly do justice to the qualities that distinguish Rude's composition: the tumult is striking, the momentum formidable. But what was the artist's feeling? What was the one he wanted to arouse in the soul of the spectator? Impossible to say. I have never been able to digest this Fury, whose hideous face was modeled on a mask of ancient tragedy, and who pushes the nation, shall I say, to victory or to defeat? What shouting! What impatience for massacre! Is it Liberty, the Fatherland, a friendly Genius? Why such a horrible figure? Is it War calling citizens to arms and singing the Marseillaise? But war, in such times and in the artist's mind, is a just thing: Bellona is the same as Pallas; she is not a monster risen from hell for the extermination of the human race; she is armed Justice, who in one hand carries the sword and in the other holds the olive tree. Rude

gave in to the excitement of an excessive energy; by exaggerating heroism, he fell into the charge, and this made his work ambiguous,

It is that after having conceived it as a classical allegory, he executed it in a Romantic style: he was keen on Bellona's large mouth, since he reproduced it in the statue of Marshal Ney, which can be seen in the Luxembourg. This is how artists like to repeat themselves. But see the misfortune: Ney's cry is just as equivocal, as unpleasant to see as that of Tisiphone in the Arc de Triomphe. One wonders if it is the Ney of Waterloo leading his squadrons of cuirassiers in despair into the English squares, or the Ney of Lonsle-Saunier, seeking to draw, with the cry of Long live the king! his motionless soldiers against the ghost of the island of Elba. And when one considers that the statue of the unfortunate Ney is erected on the very square where he was shot after the Hundred Days, one cannot help but wonder whether the creators of this monument intended to avenge the memory of the warrior or expiate his conduct. An examination of the Arc de Triomphe would provide material for more than one critical observation. I would like to know, for example, what is the meaning of this Napoleon in a tunic, a figure half allegorical, half real, toward whom the demon of war we were just speaking of urges the Revolution to the song of the Marseillaise, while behind him, on the other side of the monument, hide desolation, the despair of mothers, the murder of children and the elderly. I am perfectly aware of the insult to imperial glory in these comparisons; But whose fault is it, if not the mind that conceived the monument and regulated its layout? Every monument, the expression of an idea, must have its unity. I have all the more right to seek this unity in the four large bas-reliefs of the Arc de l'Étoile, since all four are more or less allegorical. Now, what happens to all these allegories? To avoid slandering the Emperor, I am obliged to tell myself that the minister left the artists, to whom the bas-reliefs were entrusted, free to choose their subject and execute it as they saw fit; that they did not consult together, that there is disparity here; in a word, that this great work of modern French art lacks unity.

LEOPOLD ROBERT Let's change genre. What first struck me in David's Leonidas, in The Oath at the Tennis Court, in The First Consul Climbing the Alps, was the ideal; the irrationality of the work only became apparent to me afterward, upon reflection. This

idealistic impression is generally the first to be felt in the paintings of the great masters; this priority is due to prestige.

exercised by the very power of art. On the contrary, what first struck me in the frontispiece of the Pantheon, and in Rude's group of the Arc de l'Étoile, was irrationality. But however this happens; whether the irrationality of a work of art is revealed to my mind from the first moment or after long reflection, the effect will always be the same: as soon as reason in me is not satisfied, or, what amounts to the same thing, as soon as it has ceased to be so, taste, which had initially allowed itself to be prejudged, joins in and makes an about-face; the ideal falls, and I become completely insensitive to what had first captured my imagination and my heart. On this account, it will be said, I must find nothing beautiful in the arts, since, reviewing artistic evolution from the beginning of civilization to the present day, one finds nothing, not even the Iliad, that is entirely rational. But this is to which I replied that art, although incomplete in its truth and its idea, although only imperfectly aware of its high mission, nonetheless remains rational and truthful as soon as it responds to general thought; as soon as, through its frankness and spontaneity, it faithfully expresses the sentiment of the masses. This is how, in the presence of the works of the Middle Ages, those of the Greeks, the ancient Egyptians, and even the Renaissance, identifying myself in thought with the mores of each era, I indulge without scruple in my admiration before these monuments of societies that no longer exist, and whose good faith it is impossible for me to suspect; this, I say, is how I can admire a Descent from the Cross by Rubens as much as Rembrandt's Night Watch. Rubens, despite all the mythologies and allegories that he let slip from his brush, and which I in turn leave for what they are worth; Rubens, as soon as he becomes a Catholic and a church painter again, is as true in devout Belgium as Rembrandt himself is in Protestant and republican Amsterdam. But today, where is the truthful artist among us? Is there a shadow of truth, from the point of view of our morals, our beliefs, our revolutionary tradition, our aesthetic aspirations, in all this classical, romantic, fanciful, pagan, Renaissance, or medieval art? Is it not, on the contrary, the height of irrationality? I admit that in David's painting there is at least this much that is true: that the Greeks and Latins we read about in school contributed to our revolution; I admit, for the same reason, that in the paintings of E. Delacroix, Ary Scheffer, and others, there

exists this tiny particle of truth: that for a time our literature was saturated with Shakespearean imitations, Oriental reminiscences of the Middle Ages. But who does not see that this kind of truth is yet another lie? that this rationality is a reduction to

the absurd, since it accuses us in what is most intimate to us, our institutions, our literature, and our language? I therefore ask, I earnestly ask that art become again among us, as it once was, a true art; failing which it is not even worthy of being included, as an archaeological or transitional work, in our museums; it does not belong to history. I have not seen, as far as I remember, Léopold Robert's painting, The Harvesters; but I have often admired it in the engravings that have been published, my imagination supplying, with its own inventions, what escaped me from the original. Well, I will be told, here is truth, reality, with a sufficient dose of the ideal. It is human, popular; It's natural, and it's at the same time beautiful and moral: everything you could wish for in matters of art... – Let's not get ahead of ourselves, dear reader. A flawless painting, like a flawless sonnet, is a rare and difficult thing. Léopold Robert's has long given me great pleasure, and I don't want to take back any of the praise it has deserved. By dint of thinking about it—we only focus our thoughts on things we love and admire—I've ended up finding more than one thing to criticize in the work of the Neufchâtel painter.

Let's first make a rule. A portrait—I'm taking this from a rather high place—must have, if possible, the accuracy of a photograph; it must, more than a photograph, express the life, the intimate, habitual thoughts of the subject. While light, non-thinking, instantaneous in its action, can only give a suddenly fixed image of the model, the artist, more skillful than light, because he reflects and feels, will convey a prolonged feeling in his figure; he will express its habit, its life. The photographed image is a crystallization made between two pulse beats; the portrait made by the artist, in a series of sittings and based on long observation, reveals to you weeks, months, years of a single existence. Thus, man is much better known through painting than through photography. But whatever latitude is given to the painter, he is forbidden to flatter or slander his model. The portrait may be more or less expressive, therefore more or less ideal: it must never cease to be true; such a lie is a betrayal of art. What I have just said about the

portrait, I say it, and even more so, about any painting representing a topical scene: I mean that it must be eminently true, never flattered; that it reproduces the nations and classes of society according to their types, their morals, their passions, and their ideas: it matters little, moreover, whether the different figures that form the group are or are not portraits. We have said (Chapter III) that the painter has the right to

to vary its figures infinitely, from beautiful to ugly, as nature itself does: all that is required of it is that they remain within their natural truth and that they express something. The strength and vivacity of expression, the resulting feeling: such is the ideal here. Now, this is precisely what makes me doubt the Harvesters.

Certainly, these peasants bringing in their harvest, and who from time to time stop to dance, are very handsome fellows; the one driving the cart and holding back the buffaloes is admirably built and proud: an emperor would not look better on his triumphal chariot. But aren't these good people a little flattered? Am I sure that I have before me real Italian peasants, in body and soul, and not studio models, in harvester's costume, with a sense of the ideal in the artist's style? For here is what worries me. Since I have not traveled in Italy, I cannot affirm that the ultramontane peasants are not better built, more elegant, and braver than those on this side of the Alps; I am therefore forced to rely on the artist's testimony. But then a doubt seizes me, a painful doubt, which, the more I try to banish, the more it persists and bites me. I wonder how such vigorous, romantic, and bold fellows are incapable of combining, on occasion, rustic labor with the profession of soldier, and of practicing rifle drill as well as dancing to the sound of the bagpipes; How, in order to free themselves from foreign domination, do they need foreign protection? It was the Lombardy campaign, I do not conceal it, that suggested these reflections to me, more serious than many artists might at first believe. It is clear, in fact, that if the majority of Italian peoples, with the exception of the Piedmontese and perhaps the Lombards, are so antipathetic to the profession of arms, that for centuries they have constantly belonged to foreign masters, this is due to a disposition of nature or institution that must betray itself somewhere in the physiognomy, and which it was up to the painter, which it was essentially his duty, to express, on pain of flattery and lies, that is to say, of nullity. I love the

countryside and rustic work; the spectacle of nature and agricultural customs moves me, and I am not hostile to any nationality. But I don't want to be imposed upon, and I like to know those who are introduced to me. Léopold Robert didn't think of any of this. He gave us a lovely bucolic setting, always fanciful, but nothing that would instruct us, we who so need instruction; nothing that would fully reveal the temperament of our friends the Italians. Do you think that if we had known them better before 1859, we would have striven so hard to rid them of the Austrians? Were they worth it?

pain? Didn't they run the risk of finding themselves much worse off? The Italian is handsome, handsomer than the French, tall, strong, intelligent, artistic; foreigners are odious to him, centralization unbearable. How is it then that the Italians know neither how to maintain order and liberty at home, nor form their federation, nor secure an honorable rank in Europe; that they always need sometimes a German emperor to deliver them from the Pope or the King of France, and sometimes a French king or emperor, allied with the Pope, to deliver them from the German? Such a phenomenon demands explanation. The philosopher, historian, psychologist, or moralist will know, with more or less success, how to penetrate this mystery of the Italian soul; I say that this study is also the domain of the painter. I would like to observe them closely, these Italian peasants, who readily become brigands, insurgents, or smugglers—with them, it's all the same—but who cannot bear military service, and whom Leopold Robert made so beautiful that one could mistake them for the gods of the countryside in disguise.

After what I have just said, it is pointless for me to dwell on certain details that further highlight the irrationality of the painting. Who is this tall woman, stiff and prim, carrying a child in a girdle, and who sits, without the slightest smile, atop the chariot, like a Our Lady of the Hermits on her altar? One cannot take a step in Italy without being pursued by the image of the Madonna, unless we mistake her for an Isis or a Ceres, which amounts to the same thing. While the men dance to the sound of bagpipes, the woman in question seems to weep in misery over the few meager sheaves thrown here and there onto the cart, for the sole purpose of warning passersby that the harvest is in. However, Léopold Robert

could not have failed to observe in France, or even in Switzerland, the mountains of sheaves that our peasants bring home at harvest time, the last of which arrives crowned with greenery and flowers, to the cries of joy of the children and women, hoisted with great difficulty to the summit: a far more vivid image of rural richness, which fills the farmer's heart with concentrated joy. Léopold Robert recoiled from this bountiful abundance, beside which he apparently would not have known how to arrange his characters, and he wasted his talent on a false conception and a useless fantasy. HORACE VERNET A fact that attests to the truth of our principles is the immense popularity of Mr. Horace VERNET. Of all the painters of the century, he is the one whom the masses have the

better understood, and who can flatter himself with having been the most of his time, which, moreover, did not cost him a great effort of genius. Seizing, with all the more success because he found it in himself, a trait of our national character, the swagger or soldierly chic, Mr. Horace Vernet made military painting a sort of specialty, and the entire French army, its history, its glories, a heritage. In this respect, at least, one can say of him that he is the national painter, as it was said of Béranger that he was the national poet, of Mr. Thiers the national historian. Is this then the regenerator that our distress calls for, the artist of genius, philosopher, who must raise us from our decadence by uniting by an indissoluble pact truth, morality and art; Man predestined, finally, to replace the symbolic, idolatrous, spiritualist, and fanciful schools of the past, schools now exhausted and judged, with the imperishable, ever-young and ever-fertile, rational and concrete as well as ideal, school of the education of humanity? What madness! Horace Vernet, the most superficial of painters, which explains his incredible productivity, who became a specialist through indifference to any idea; Horace Vernet, the official illustrator of our brave army, the favorite portraitist of the camps, who made his art a dependency of the military school; Horace Vernet, the leader of aesthetic renovation, the promoter of the new, human art, without heroes as without idols!... Risum teneatis! Why not rather Mr. Émile Marco Saint-Hilaire? Horace Vernet said of himself: "I've played my part: you have to think about closing up shop. I know what my works lack, in terms of idea and execution. What do you want? You have to swallow me as I am; I only have one tap, but it's leaked, and anyone after me who dares to open it won't see anything good come of it.

I've worked immensely; I've earned millions that have gone I don't know where; I've lived very well. I've traveled the world for a long time, as the song goes; I've seen many things, too many things for my head, which isn't strong... "I've not only devoted myself to the glorification of the French armies, I've also rendered them some services in person. Ask Ingres and other painters if they paid with their bodies in my way." This or that misfortune might not have happened during the African War if the colonel, the general, the marshal had listened to my advice. So the officers of land and sea give me credit. What was the name of the admiral who, to facilitate the execution of my painting, The Capture of Lisbon, ordered a general alert on board his ship in 1840? – Ah! Admiral Lalande, a charming man. Two

Poor gunners lost their lives in this exercise... - And the commander who fired salvos in my honor... Charles! His name? - M. Montagnac - a brave man!

"I have neither bias nor system; I render as accurately as possible what I see, without fussing, and I conform to events. That's all." (French Artists, by TH. SYLVESTRE) The biographer from whom I borrow these quotes adds: "Everyone has seen in Europe, Asia, and Africa this improviser, incapable of contemplation, capturing each country on the fly, barely sensing its customs, and reappearing after a few months of absence, like an actor, in various costumes. Gravity and reflection suit him as silence and solemnity suit the magpie and the squirrel. Nothing agitates his mind; The magical changes of sun and shore, the astonishing variety of temperaments, characters, and laws; the penetrating series of forms, colors, melodies, exotic perfumes, beauties that accumulate in treasures of poetry and knowledge in an attentive and delicate intelligence, passed over his eyes like the reflections of fire pass over a windowpane. One would say that he saw only through the window of a railway carriage the world waltzing around him and disappearing in a powdery light... Consistency is impossible for him; all reasoning makes him impatient; he must be left to roam the countryside in complete freedom. "Mr. Horace Vernet has treated all known genres from the smallest to the largest dimension, flitting from one subject to another, paddling in the stream or climbing Parnassus. What taste in the series of his compositions! Judith and Holofernes, Lancer Plucking a Chicken; – Abraham and Hagar, Foraging Dragon; –

Magdalene in the Desert, Reconciliation of Drunkards; – Christ with the Reed, Country Dance of Tourlourous; – Farewell at Fontainebleau, La Fornarina; – Invalid with a Wooden Leg, Beautiful Edith with a Swan Neck; – Portrait of Pope Gregory XVI, Hussar Flirting with the Girl from the Inn of the Grace of God; – Enthronement of Leo X, Soldiers Playing with Drugs; – Raphael and Michelangelo at the Vatican, the Rendezvous of Jean-Jean, who is frightened on the way by Doctor Albert's posters; – Louis XIV and La Vallière, and a multitude of other things of the same ilk, interspersed with sieges, battles, parades, bivouacs, guardhouses, and kitchens. » A list like this is enough to know what to expect from the value of an artist. Horace Vernet's prodigious success reflects an entire era, an entire nation. How many do you think there are classicists and romantics in the mass of the French people? Perhaps one in a hundred thousand.

Horace Vernet represents everyone; he is understood, applauded by everyone. Are we then a people of artists, as we like to say, or a people of grimacers and scamps? Among us, everything is degenerating, everything is falling apart; one can say in unison: what music, what airs, what songs, those which, renewed each year, delight the multitude! We no longer have a national dance; the minuet and other so-called character dances are forgotten. The polka and the mazurka, like the country dance and the waltz, are for us nothing more than a pretext for the cancan. Open a public ball: dancers will only be satisfied if the police allow them to interweave the most cynical postures and gestures with the figures. For one hundred and fifty years, from Corneille to Beaumarchais, tragedy and comedy, revived from the Greeks, it is true, flourished in our country, then regarded as the homeland of good literature and taste. Then, Romanticism having failed to reform, we fell into obscene dramaturgy, tableaux vivants; into the pornocratic literature of Mogador, Rigolboche, etc.; into historical exhibitions and military evolutions in fifty tableaux. The Victories and Conquests, the capture of Constantine, Malakoff, Puebla, etc., these are what, along with the scenes and maxims of the life of Loretto, finally became fashionable. I wonder how the idea never occurred to the government, protector of art and morality, whose censorship allows itself so many things, to ban such spectacles. We resemble trait for trait the Romans of decadence, who, disgusted with Plautus, Terence, and Seneca, had no taste left but for the

butcheries of the circus! We have just demonstrated the extent of our architectural talent in these five-story buildings that make up the new Paris, where the population is piled up in barracks: uniform, inconvenient constructions, the prototype of which is the barracks, and the furnished hotel the masterpiece. We imported our squares and public gardens from across the Channel; but we were careful to leave the English their old system of separate dwellings, where each family, in the city as in the country, occupies, as much as possible, a house of its own. We will not be rich enough or free enough for a long time; we do not have enough self-respect for such morals. Who would be surprised, in this mess, to see painting and statuary constantly falling into chauvinism, slander, and obscenity? Let's be fair to everyone: Horace Vernet is no more reprehensible in all this than the two illustrious leaders of the Classical and Romantic schools, Messrs. Delacroix and Ingres. Are they not, in the series of their works and the choice of subjects, just as irrational as he? Are not all three...

Are not all three members of the same Academy? The only difference between them is that M. Delacroix and M. Ingres take themselves seriously, while Horace Vernet frankly admits that he does not believe in his own painting.

"I render as accurately as possible what I see," he says, "without looking for noon at two o'clock. My tap ran well, I earned millions; I lived well, I played my little part!..." - Every vice or crime, says a proverb, stems from stupidity: every demoralization of a society is caused by the imbecility of those who lead and instruct it. Praise as much as you like the purity and correctness of M. Ingres's drawing, the ideal beauty of his figures; praise, in M. Delacroix, the movement, the life, the prestige of color, the energy of expression; Insist, on the other hand, on the thin drawing, the dry and sharp touch, the dissonant coloring, the absence of ideas, poetry, emotion, and character, which distinguish M. Horace Vernet: you will nonetheless be forced to recognize that among them all, illogic, contradiction, inconsistency, and ultimately absurdity are the same; consequently, art, as they understand and practice it, is without foundation, and if the latter can be accused of having contributed more than his two rivals to corrupting the taste of his country, this is because, in the main part of his work, he knew better than them how to make himself understood, which establishes a compensation

in his favor.

I saw at the Palace of Versailles the famous Smala, Horace Vernet's masterpiece, which is sixty-six feet long and sixteen feet high. The effect this gallery-like painting had on me gave me the measure of the man, and disgusted me forever with his painting. I don't know if the reader remembers Racine's epigram on Boyer's Judith: At his Judith, Boyer, by chance, Was sitting near a rich cashier.

He was very pleased, for the good financier Was moved and wept immeasurably.

"You know, you know," the old rhymer told him; "Beauty touches you, and you would not be in the mood To seize you for a load of nonsense." Then the rich man, weeping, said to him: "I weep, alas! over this poor Holofernes, So wickedly put to death by Judith."

Foolishness and impotence! I have no other words to characterize such things.

works. Boyer, the tragic poet, does such a good job of making his heroine, Judith, the holy and valiant Amazon of the Hebrews, appear atrocious, and the spectator curses her, while feeling sorry for the leader of the Barbarians, who came down from the North to destroy the people of God. Mr. Horace Vernet, in turn, charged with celebrating one of the feats of arms of the French army, conceives his subject in such a way that, in the presence of his immense painting, at the sight of these distraught women, these old men, these children, these warriors massacred in their tents while defending their freedom and their homeland, one feels seized with horror and anger against this band of foreigners who, for more than thirty years since they set foot in Africa, have only known, under the guise of civilization, to ravage, pillage, burn, smoke out, massacre, carry out raids, collect boudjous, drive back the populations and expand the desert, as did formerly the hordes of Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, Attila, Xerxes, Nebuchadnezzar and other scourges of God, that the progress of justice, it is necessary to hope for it, has forever returned to nothingness. Certainly, the cause which determined the capture of Algiers by the French was just, and I like to believe that, to an extent unknown to me, the conquest of its territory and the submission of the tribes who inhabited it were the consequence. But, before the painting by Mr. Horace

Vernet, I wonder if we really had reason or pretext to confuse the Arabs with the Turks; what the natives did to us; what we have the pretension to do with them and their country; why, after having exterminated so many different tribes, we then went to attack the Kabyles; what progress our morals, our religion, our ideas, our industry, our arts have made on this land, which we cannot or do not know how to colonize, and which devours us. The thirty-three years of Algerian occupation are a disgrace for France, a disgrace whose memory Mr. Horace Vernet's painting can have no other purpose than to immortalize. Thirty-three years of devastation and ineptitude! Isn't this a fine subject for illustration, a fine opportunity to excite our chauvinism? Oh! I dared to criticize David's Oath of the Tennis Court, Eugène Delacroix's Boissy d'Anglas; I mocked the frontispiece of the Pantheon and the Marseillaise from the Arc de Triomphe; but, recalling Mr. Horace Vernet's Smala, I almost regret my words. Take away this painting: for the common people who admire it, it is a detestable example; For honest people who know what feelings it responds to, it is a cause for remorse. The artist has been paid, I suppose: I request that this canvas be removed, raked, degreased, and then sold as tow to the rag-and-bone man.

The artist cannot, under any circumstances, remain indifferent to the scene he depicts,

nor consequently leave the viewer in doubt. As one cannot admit that art could ever serve to celebrate the exploits of the Cartouches and the Messalinas, the artist must above all things, both for the honor of his brush and for his personal consideration, avoid in his compositions the shadow of ambiguity. A work must be such, in its entirety and in its details, that the justification or condemnation of the scene immediately emerges. If the event itself is doubtful, as I observed with regard to the Oath of the Tennis Court and the Insurrection of the 1st Prairial, then refrain, unless your goal is precisely to add to the horror and pity by creating doubt. Mr. Horace Vernet is incapable of understanding such things. As long as his soldiers are stylish, their élan superb, the Bedouin beaten, dismayed, he is happy. The uniform, that's his part. What does the rest matter to him? Is it up to him to assess the causes and the end of the war, the morality of the conquest; to lay bare the conscience of our warriors, and, perhaps, thereby plead the enemy's cause? No, no; he told you: "I have neither ideas nor systems; I render as

accurately as possible what I see, without looking for noon at two o'clock, and I conform to events; I have earned millions from this, and I have lived well!..." Indifferent to ideas, indifferent to politics, indifferent to any kind of ideal, Mr. Horace Vernet, despite his specialization, cannot be regarded as the epic painter of the army: that would be an insult to it. – "For forty years, he has been diminishing the soldier's physiognomy, lowering his character, turning him into a joker, and into that joker who disgusts. From the warriors of Masséna, Ney, and Jourdan, he has made the cabaret clown, the slave of the disciplinary companies, the barracks jester, the troubadour of the ten o'clock leave, the foraging hussar, the bivouac scullion. David and Gros were the painters of the forum and the battlefields: M. Horace Vernet is the Raphael of the canteens..."

5He who reasons best is not necessarily the one with the best taste; far from it.

This is why the art critic must be very circumspect: there is no subject in which criticism is prone to committing greater blunders.

There is a painting by Mr. Millet of The Harvesters, superior, I have been assured, to that of L. Robert,

and entirely in keeping with the rustic truth. I have not been able to see this fine work, nor has The Grafting Gardener by the same man, and therefore cannot comment on it. They are cited as belonging to the new school, inappropriately called realistic, which I will discuss below.

CHAPTER XI

Mr. Chenavard's Opinion on the Degeneration of Art and the Coming End of Humanity – Difficulties Encountered by Art in the Nineteenth Century. The So-called Realist School Born of General Irrationality

That's where we are. Our nation, whose task since the Revolution of '89 seemed to be to summarize the traditions of all ages, then to take up and expand upon Dutch thought, has, until now, failed in this mission. Talent has not been lacking; intelligence alone has proven insufficient. We have been unable to imagine anything better, in our presumptuous ignorance, than to play with a finite past, which we admired all the more the less we understood it. We have worked hard, produced much, discussed much, and to arrive at what, good God! nothingness. The ancients, in obeying the spirit that animated them, were true in their art; this is why they have deserved the praise of posterity, which has declared their works immortal. We have only known how to imitate, to copy the ancients, without thinking of producing our own ideal, without suspecting that, by this imitation, we ourselves were in error. Strangers to the thought that guides us, we have made the art of our ancestors a profession for ourselves, and we have boasted of being the artistic people par excellence: Paris has become the great market for art articles, as it had long been for fashion articles. What a fair! Gods and goddesses, Christs and Madonnas, Capuchins and virgins, soldiers and prostitutes; kings, nobles, bourgeois, peasants, proletarians; luminaries and mediocrities; Mythology, allegory, symbolism, idolatry, spirituality, realism, eclecticism: historical paintings and genre paintings; battles, landscapes, seascapes,

academies, caricatures; barracks paintings and tavern paintings; altar paintings and barracks paintings, all inspired by the Greeks, Italians, Germans, Spanish, and Dutch, on commission and ad libitum! Our artists stop at nothing.

demanding; their imagination is equal to any inspiration; they are from all times, all countries, all religions; the soul of humanity breathes in their person. Do you want antique, Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance? To serve you. Alas! they are not asked for so much. Cheap housing and postcard portraits at 3 francs a dozen: that is enough to satisfy the people of Paris for the moment. The people, at least, follow their instinct, which does not always deceive them, while they, with their erudition, have come to know that, each generation having its own way of seeing, and consequently of feeling, the ideal of one is not that of the other, and that the true artist is the one who best responds to the aesthetics of his contemporaries. Entrepreneurs of imitations, counterfeits, pastiches, bric-a-brac, there is only one thing they don't seem to care about, which is being themselves and revealing their ideas. Now, since the artist, whatever he does, can ultimately only produce himself, with the milieu to which he echoes, you see art marching hand in hand with literature and politics, the decadence of taste following that of ideas and morals; it is nothing more than lies, hypocrisy, cynicism more or less illuminated, varnished, illustrated, in studio terms, poses and jokes, serving as a cover for prostitution.

Was it not the sadness of this situation that suggested to Mr. Chenavard his theory of the progressive weakening of art, from which he deduces that of the impending end of humanity?

"We have seen," says this learned artist, "the reappearance in less than half a century, in the works of imitators—beginning with David, who went back to the sources of antiquity, up to Courbet, who tended to revive Flemish naturalism—all the physiognomies that had been fashionable one after the other for two thousand years. Modern art is nothing other than a game of memory. Enter a house in Paris inhabited by twenty artists: you will find there students of Fiésole, Raphael, Rubens, Veronese, Velázquez, or Holbein. What are they getting at? Painting only to make money is not an avowable goal; Painting for the sake of painting, according to the principle of art for art's sake, is an insignificant thing: one might as well devote oneself to dancing..." He adds: "To every

civilization, a perishable art. Architecture ended its day with primitive religions; no more sculpture after Greece; no more painting after seventeenth-century Holland. Any attempt at art made today, except in music, is an impotent archaism." - And what is music itself? - "A materialistic, dissolving art, which seems made expressly to console the old human species for its long suffering, and to

to put it to sleep in the tomb." (French Artists, by TH. SYLVESTRE) It is indisputable that the weakening of the most delicate of our soul's faculties, the aesthetic faculty, if it were proven, would be a sure sign that our species is beginning to age, that it is leaning toward the tomb, and is doing little more than spinning its shroud. It is with moral life as with physiological life, intimately linked to one another: cessation begins at the extremities, gradually reaches the center, and ends at the heart. But for a long time, especially in old people, sensitivity has been dulled, the acuity of the senses has disappeared; so that the death of the heart is the last act of a long and progressive extinction. So it is with moral life: imagination, memory, tenderness of heart, pass away one after the other; conscience or moral sense perishes last; but when the end comes, aesthetic sensibility, which, so to speak, envelops all the other faculties, has long since worn out, and man has fallen back into animal coarseness. I have often seen this frightening idea of M. Chenavard's laughed at; but I have never seen it refuted by anyone. However, the fact of our artistic decadence remains; no one denies it, and there is no longer any need to be a misanthrope to add that with this exhaustion of the aesthetic faculty, the mortification of conscience seems today to be taking place. The feeling that dominates, in fact, among the masses is not really a need for art, it's a need for luxury: which is not quite the same thing; a need that makes the art of drinking, eating, enjoying, positively the first; that of dressing, the second: after which there is nothing left, beneath this vermillion and flashy skin, but rottenness and misery. I hear a lot of humming and strumming: does that prove that we really have a taste for music? Isn't music today simply an accompaniment to voluptuousness? Our consciences are rotten; our morals are appalling: how could there be any true artists? – And this is also what many writers affirm, who, apart from the question of art, maintain that the moment of humanity's moral flowering is the same as that of aesthetic flowering: so that civilization is decidedly

on the way back, and that we, who believe in nothing beautiful or good, no longer have to choose between two options: to recollect ourselves in death if we are poor, or to give ourselves over to pleasure if we are rich, according to the precept of Sardanapalus: Eat, drink, enjoy.

It is permissible to appeal this condemnation. If the reader has followed the development of our thought with any attention, he must realize that the current depression of art is in no way caused, as Mr. supposes, by...

Chenavard, the age-determined weakening of the aesthetic faculty in society; in this respect, Mr. Chenavard has misdiagnosed and misjudged. This depression of art is caused by the lack of rationality that has manifested itself, since the Renaissance, in the domain of art, and which has been particularly prevalent, as we have just observed ourselves (Chapter X), since the Revolution. In a word, it is not a depravation of taste, a disease or decrepitude of the aesthetic faculty that we are dealing with: it is an error of judgment.

And where does this error itself come from? Quite simply because towards the end of the Middle Ages, when the philosophical spirit came to replace religious fervor, and the feeling of human dignity put an end to supernatural authority, a revolution took place in the world analogous to the one that had put an end to Greek polytheism and substituted Christian spirituality for idolatry. In short, for three centuries, and without our knowledge, we have changed our horizons; our ideal is not that of the Middle Ages, any more than that of the Greeks; from which it follows that the conditions of art are not the same either. Now, what have we done since the Renaissance? We have preserved, by convention or concordat, in our governments and in our customs, Christian idealism; we have associated it with Greek idealism; then we have covered it all with some kind of romantic, fairy-tale, oriental, and feudal fantasy; so much so that today, in our modern world, idea and ideal, spirit and form, principles and light are completely disparate! Only music, separating itself from Gregorian chant and forging a new path with the help of theater, has been able to develop separately, in accordance with the law of progress. What's surprising, then, that art suffers, that it perishes in the most shameful of deaths?

That's not all. We have seen (chapters IV to VII) that under the reign of Egyptian idealism, typical and symbolic; of Greek idealism, devoted to the cult of form; of Christian or Gothic idealism, full of a previously unknown spirituality, and even of the ambiguous idealism of the Renaissance, the community of ideals provided by religion and morality developed among artists a power of collectivity that elevated talents very high, higher than they could ever have achieved in independent and solitary meditations. Thus, the universal, intense search for divine figures, through the simultaneous and long-prolonged efforts of artists, made Greek statuary superior. This is, again, how the architecture of the Middle Ages unfolded. I have seen the cathedrals of Paris, Chartres, Amiens, Strasbourg,

Cologne, Antwerp, Ghent, and I told myself at each one that these monuments, by their immensity and variety, were like great poems; that a single master may well provide the plan, but that such a conception only blossoms in an individual mind after a long series of studies: which presupposes a series of attempts, efforts, monuments, in which a host of artists have taken part, and from which the most recent arrivals, provided they have a little genius, are able to profit more than anyone. 7

Such a thing could no longer happen today. Our ideal, which is now all of humanity, with its labors, its successes, its miseries; this ideal, I say, having nothing supernatural about it, can no longer impose itself in a form that is, so to speak, orthodox, and therefore common; offering itself to each one in its infinite variety, is not likely to produce a great force of collectivity. Each artist, while drawing inspiration as best he can from the works of his colleagues and from the study of his model, remains abandoned to himself, and works under his personal inspiration. Shall we conclude from this increase in difficulties, from this change of theme, which, from the narrow mental dream of the gods, has made us pass to the infinite contemplation of ourselves, that there is inferiority among artists and decadence of art? This would be to claim that our mechanics are inferior to those of the Egyptians, because we no longer use the inclined plane to erect our columns and obelisks; or even that the architecture of the Greeks, that of the Middle Ages, were not comparable to theirs, because neither the Greek temple nor the Gothic cathedral itself are comparable in mass to the

Egyptian pyramid. Admitting as true the tradition of the Giants and the Cyclopes, it is certain that our blacksmiths would not be able to handle their tools; but what is the industry of Vulcan, the Telchines, and the Cyclopes, in comparison with our metallurgy? What can historical and mythological Greece offer that is comparable to our steam engines, our turbines, or simply our power hammer? It is thus with art: it must not be measured solely by its effects; one must also take into account the goal, the elements, and the means, especially the difficulty overcome. In this respect, I dare say, we are progressing over the ancients. Certainly, by observing ourselves, we will never succeed in representing ourselves as sons or minions of the Eternal, as happened to the Greeks seeking the image of their gods in their own faces; but we will make the images made by our hands think and speak, as neither Christians nor Greeks ever knew how. We will soon acquire proof of this.

As for Mr. Chenavard's criticism of music, not to mention that

It is unfair to hold art responsible for the stupidity of dilettanti. This criticism would perhaps be justified if music had the pretension of being the sole substitute for the other arts; if only it asserted its superiority over them, but this is not the case: music has its own existence, more limited than painting, because its means are less; but just as perfect in its genre: which makes Mr. Chenavard's criticism fall flat. I like to think that music has not found its full use in modern society these days; it is called, if I may say so, to a more serious and more general service; but it is no less true that, in the current retrogression, it almost single-handedly supports the retreat, and that at the time I write, the disdain for art, especially painting and statuary, would be much more profound if minds were not held back on this slope by the universal, though very poorly understood, taste for music. No, art does not die; consequently, it never retrogrades. Without doubt, it no longer forms, as it once did, the avant-garde of civilization. Art has ceased to outstrip religion, science, industry, and justice, but it marches in their wake, and when Mr. Chenavard, after having noted our progress, after having assigned to the present era, as its proper characteristic, these two great things: science having reached its apogee and the brotherhood of races, concludes from this intellectual decline, the end of art, and the dissolution of society, we are justified in telling him that he is throwing himself into the most flagrant of contradictions. 8 To

prove this to him, it is enough to remind him of the principles: the ideal and the IDEA are correlative terms; when the latter is in motion, it is impossible for the former to remain inert, and for the faculty that serves to express it to diminish. But there is a true fact that creates the greatest difficulty for art, having reached this level of civilization, and to which I draw the attention of artists. All men who have received a certain education, all those who have acquired some distinction in literature, philosophy, law or politics, even industry, claim to pose as amateurs, protectors of art, and to be knowledgeable about it. A benevolent claim, but one on which it is important that we not be mistaken, lest we suffer the most sad disappointments.

We have just said it, and I ask permission to repeat it once again: there is no IDEAL without a prior idea; no BEAUTY without a given form, without a body, type, material, or subject of art; in short, no aesthetics without a philosophy.

Now what happens with the incessant movement of ideas, with this unlimited expansion of our knowledge? Something to ponder deeply for

the artist: it is that ideas idealize themselves, so to speak, more and more through their determination, there comes a time when, in a multitude of things, the ideal merges with the idea, to the point that art seems out of use, and the artist dry. What, for example, was the idea of God at the beginning of religions? A concrete idea, first material, then zoomorphic, later anthropomorphic, whose purification leads to the conception of a superior being, unique, eternal, immaterial, immeasurable, invisible, absolute. The metaphysical conception of God therefore excluding the hypothesis of a body for God, and consequently of a divine form, the idea of divinity and its ideal in the monotheistic believer merge. Having reached this height, religion rejects all kinds of idols; it is inevitably iconoclastic. In this order of feelings and ideas, the prestige of art is therefore the opposite of dogma: at a given moment, thundering Jupiter appears ridiculous; Venus Urania herself, the goddess of beauty, is as ugly as sin. From then on, the artist is honored by the theologian; willy-nilly, if he wants to work for the cult, he must establish the ties of the one who governs it.

The same goes for justice. Of what use today, for the progress of

law and the laws, can all the excitement of plastic art, or of a poetic mythology? Formerly, the moral law had its principle in God, whose grace constituted all our virtue, giving our will power and agency. The love of God, the fear of his judgments, the hope of his rewards formed the basis of our morality: an immense subject for poetry and art. Now we claim to possess justice of our own accord, to follow it for its own sake and at all costs, without any hope of compensation, without the fear of a living soul, neither in heaven, nor on earth, nor underground. Any selfish motive, any remuneration seems insulting to us. Just as the magistrate dispenses justice without receiving gifts, we claim to be our own judges and to remain honest for the sole glory of probity. If our practice is not always in this accord with our theory, we must blame a remnant of habit, the anxieties of a society in transformation, and also the inherent weakness of a being composed of flesh and spirit. Basically, we have made law our supreme ideal, and justice for justice's sake is our maxim. What then can a painting like Michelangelo's representing the Last Judgment, a frightening image of heavenly sanction, mean in a society? Or that of Prudhon, much inferior, where we see human Justice, not very far-sighted, but guided by divine Justice, and who will seize the hiding assassin in the night? Formerly, the place of this painting by Prudhon would have been in the Assize Court: it was put in the museum as

a relic, in which they were right. As for Michelangelo's famous Last Judgment, the most fervent admirers of art today can only see it as a study in anatomy. All the more so, would we no longer tolerate those Themis, Nemesis, Adrastea, and Tisiphones of old mythology, who, by frightening the guilty, inspired so many masterpieces at the gates and among artists. What we ask for in our legal-philosophical pride is much less the courage to observe the law than the happiness of knowing it, sure as we flatter ourselves that we are of the fidelity of our consciences. We would gladly say to God, if this invocation of the sovereign Being did not form a contradiction for us: Give us intelligence, and we guarantee you our virtue. This is a long way from Christ's prayer: Do not lead us into temptation, implying: Because we are certain to perish in it. On all this, I say, art no longer has to intervene; it can do nothing directly for our progress: the tendency is for us to do without it.

The facts agree with opinion. What is required above all from a

lawyer is knowledge and logic: as for style and eloquence, they are valued incomparably less than before; they are not trusted; I would almost go so far as to say that they are disdained. It is a given, even before Molière and The Misanthrope, that law and truth subsist by themselves; that eloquence does not make them, but serves only to produce them; that, provided the lawyer focuses on demonstrating his case, he must triumph, if it is just, despite all the defects in his pronunciation, gesture, and diction; whereas if reason, knowledge, and logic fail him, there is reason to believe, despite his oratorical talent, that he will lose his case. A lawyer who would claim to influence the courts by purely rhetorical means, in the absence of serious reasons, and who would try, by dint of pathos, oratorical outbursts, and impassioned gestures, to draw in and magnetize his judges, would immediately lose the goodwill of his audience and be called to order. Eloquence, so powerful among the ancients, an essential quality of the statesman and even of the general, is tolerated today only as a material accessory, because the man who speaks before the public must first make himself heard, because a careful and methodical speech is both a tribute to the audience that listens and whose attention must be managed, and a guarantee of intelligibility. It is not always, I recognize, that things happen according to these principles: many times in our time we have seen the laziness of minds and the cowardice of consciences sacrifice right and truth to vain verbal skills. This retrograde abuse of eloquence was one of the causes of the fall of the

July Monarchy and the parliamentary system. 9 But our secret will is nonetheless, in general, that this is how things always happen; which is enough to establish my proposition, namely, that where the idea serves as an ideal, there is no room for art: it is a profession.

What I have just said about the lawyer can be applied to the scientist and the industrialist. The engineer admires in a machine the power, the solidity, the economy of springs; in a word, the idea: a few moldings added to the parts, a few touches of elegance, embellishment, like those figures placed on the prows of ships, mean nothing to him. The accuracy of the formula, its exact and successful application, that is his ideal. Go to the industrial exhibitions, which have become so brilliant that they eclipse the exhibitions of painting and statuary: what constitutes the ideal of

these industrious people, these manufacturers, these metalworkers, whose enterprises, by their splendor and immensity, have some right today to disdain the poverty of contemporary art? The ideal for them is summed up in the union of these two terms: superior product quality, minimizing production costs, terms whose synthesis is RICHNESS. I know well that wealth is not art; I know the words of this ancient painter to one of his colleagues, the author of a magnificently adorned Venus, covered in jewels and gold: Unable to make her beautiful, you made her rich! But we must not forget either that wealth is also an aesthetic element; that it is in this way that art and industry fraternize; that well-being is just as difficult to create as the ideal and that, in this respect, bewildered artists, dreaming of quick fortunes by means of their cup-and-ball games, have something to learn from the industrious. Let us summarize this chapter.

The continuing decline of art in France since the Revolution, a decline recognized by the most competent men, is not caused by a decline in aesthetic sentiment in society, nor, even more so, a weakening of artistic genius. Mr. Chenavard's opinion on this subject, an opinion renewed from that of the ancients on the progressive failure of humanity, is radically false, contradicted by better observed facts, and in itself contradictory.

The cause of this decadence, specific to our time, and more noticeable in the French nation than anywhere else, is due, firstly, to the general irrationality of works of art; secondly, to the fact that modern artists, continuing to work according to ancient idealism without having any awareness of it, have also lost the power of collectivity that so elevated earlier talents;

finally, to the comparative progress of science, legislation, philosophy, and industry, which, having regained the lead, seem to crush art with their recent successes and deprive it of its raison d'être. 10

Well, the conclusion is easy to draw: Let art become more rational, I mean let it learn to express the aspirations of the present era, as it expressed the intuitions of the primitive era; let it seize ideas, assimilate them, bring itself into unison with the universal movement, penetrate it. And since things have been established in this way, that after three thousand years of preparation, science and

industry were suddenly to take the lead in progress, justice to establish itself as the pivot of philosophy and regulator of civilization; since art, obliged to attach itself to a mobile and divergent ideal, no longer has to rely, as before, on a long-prolonged concentration of all efforts; – let artists, instead of being discouraged by the feeling of an inferiority that is only apparent, since it comes from their independence, accept the condition imposed on them; let them set to work courageously, and, I dare say, unless they are prevented by causes foreign to the constitution of the human mind and to art, other triumphs await them; a more intimate evolution, a new aesthetic life can begin for humanity. Besides, I have no business posing myself here as a prophet; I am only the echo of a fact in the process of being accomplished. The irrationality of art, since the Revolution, has been universally felt; It has made all the arguments of the Romantics against the Classics; then it was turned with the same success against the Romantics themselves. From this protest emerged a new school, first called realist, which others propose to call naturalist, and which evidently has not yet been able to determine and define itself. There are thoughts that do not give birth by themselves: this one seems to be one of them. Who are these newcomers? What do they want? Where are they going? What should we call them? This is the question we now have to examine; and it would not be a poor service to artists if we could succeed in revealing their own ideas to them, in giving them, so to speak, a consciousness of themselves. This is what we will try to do, not through a priori reasoning, but through a careful examination of works already produced.

7 Since the ideal is subordinate to the idea, the collectivity of the idea naturally entails that of the ideal; and this is why, when it exists, ten thousand students who have learned to draw count for more for the progress of art than the production of a masterpiece. Not that I am weighing number against quality; but ten thousand citizens who have learned to draw form a joy of artistic collectivity, a force of idea, an energy of the ideal, far superior to that of an individual, and which, one day finding its expression, will surpass the masterpiece.

8 I cannot believe that Pascal's universal man, this man who is always learning, who accumulates, who never dies, can age and decline. He may experience torments, oscillations, movements of

rise and fall; but to degenerate continuously seems impossible to me, contradictory even. – Humanity will come to an end, they say; the earth, which served as its cradle, must also become its grave. – I can admit the wear and tear and decay of the planet, – something I do not know; I can admit it; because the planet is not SPIRIT, CONSCIOUSNESS, and FREEDOM. But I understand, in this case, that humanity, subjected to the infertile conditions of the soil, constantly diminishing in population, will end, so to speak, voluntarily, not in decrepitude, but in a high spirituality. Having reached perfection, man must end. Having reached the highest degree of consciousness, intelligence, freedom, dignity, man, in the presence of an exhausted, worn-out, rebellious nature, inferior to him; Man, no longer having to regret his failed career, having become GOD, must come into harmony with necessity and bequeath his soul to a younger world. The Eternal was glorified in him; God was incarnate: may the planet, a worn, pale globe, henceforth roll solitarily like the moon, until it disintegrates, and its fragments are gathered by other worlds.

9 Political literature was founded in 89 by Mirabeau. With the empire dead, we had the Chambers of the Restoration, and from time to time remarkable articles. After 1830, everything became pure joke, gossip, and impertinence. Men, unworthy of appearing at the bar of a village judge, began to wrap the most insipid commonplaces and the most insolent untruths in the oratorical molds of the great masters. We have the eloquence of the Legislative Body and the articles of M. Grandguillot; we couldn't even tolerate Veuillot.

10 One of the causes of the general inferiority of painting among us is the immense superiority of literature over the plastic arts. Read Diderot's Salon articles: there are very few of them whose reading does not give you more pleasure than the sight of the painting or statue he is discussing, even when he is praising it. Read the reviews of our most accredited feuilletonists: the same effect will be felt by you. In a few lines of marvelous style, the subject is established, the work judged, the artist swallowed up, if his work is even mediocre; and when it is truly beautiful, it can barely stand up to the writer's prose. Those who write reviews must be careful: those who read them must not lose the desire to see the works they discuss; their oratorical descriptions must not, I say, become such formidable competition for the unfortunate artists that, after reading the article, they find the painting paltry, cold, and insipid,

as has happened to me many times; they must come to the aid of our weakness, teach us to appreciate beauty where it exists, while giving artists wise advice and just encouragement.

CHAPTER XII

In what terms did the new school assert itself – Examination of some paintings by G. Courbet: 1° The Peasants of Flagey or The Return from the Fair

Since realism received its name from M. Courbet; since it is he who, by talent as much as by audacity, most energetically expresses the current trend; since, finally, it is his painting of the Priests Returning from the Conference that provided me with the opportunity for this study, I will be forgiven for focusing more specifically on this artist. I do not intend, therefore, to confiscate or deny in his favor any talent similar to his own, any legitimate participation in the revolution of which he is the standard-bearer, any deserved glory. It is not when I preach equality and mock great men, when I fight with all my might to definitively establish the predominance of law over the ideal; when I go so far as to applaud iconoclastic fury; it is not at that moment that I will take from among my contemporaries a painter, however great he may be in his art, to make him an idol. By limiting my observations to a small number of paintings, as I have done with the classics, romantics, war painters, or genre painters, and by requesting these paintings from a single artist, because, having been away from my country for nearly five years, I was unable to get to know the others, I expressly reserve, in favor of those who are entitled to them, the titles acquired and the praise deserved.

It has been said of Courbet that he was only continuing Dutch naturalism.

This is true to a certain extent; It would be a regrettable prejudice against Courbet if he were descended from no one, if he continued nothing in humanity. But Courbet is a Frenchman from the Jura,

not a Dutchman from the Zuyderzée; he was born Catholic and has nothing of Protestantism; add that since the time when the great painters of Holland and Flanders flourished, Rembrandt, van der Helst, Téniers, etc., the world has seen many men and many ideas succeed one another.

and many events. We had the century of Louis XIV and that of Voltaire; German philosophy and the Revolution. We had, in painting as in politics, that long retrogression from 1799 to 1863, seasoned with romanticism, eclecticism, socialism, chauvinism, Epicureanism, profound cowardice, and universal venality. It is impossible that we do not find something of all this in the works of the master from Franche-Comté; and those who accuse him, as well as his colleagues of the same school, of being only successors, are already showing little justice. Fantasy in art has had its day; its only resource now is to serve modern reason: let us therefore begin with him by reasoning correctly.

I previously reviewed Léopold Robert's The Harvesters, a sort of transition between the idealism of the classics and romantics and the realism of the new school. Let us compare this painting to a similar work by Courbet, The Peasants of Flagey, or Return from the Fair.

We are far here from the adonized peasants of L. Robert, even further perhaps from those republican fiefdoms that Rembrandt and van der Helst depicted, the former in The Night Watch, the latter in The Banquet of the Arquebusiers, and over which, while preserving the resemblance of the persons and types, they could not help but shed a certain glimmer of glory, transported by the face of the gods. Here there is no pose, no flattery; not the slightest hint of an ideal figure. Everything is true, captured from life; not that I mean to say that the figures are portraits; but they are such as you believe you have encountered them everywhere; the scene, finally, in its entirety and its details, of such truth, such naiveté, that you are tempted to accuse the painter of having totally lacked invention and of having given you a daguerreotype for a work of art. But pause for a moment on this realism with its vulgar appearances, and you will soon feel that beneath this vulgarity lies a depth of observation which is, in my opinion, the true point of art. It is with the simplicity of great painters as with that of great writers: nothing is easier at first glance; you just have to speak like everyone else; try

it, and you will see, as the song says, if you succeed. The scene takes place around 1830, shortly before, shortly after, under the constitutional charter, at least thirty years after the first Revolution. In the foreground, a man appears in a long coat, short breeches, and a tricorn hat, his cotton umbrella under his arm and his pipe in his mouth, chasing a young pig destined for fattening. Further away are two peasants in smocks, mounted on horses they are also bringing back from the market, one of

mature, with a serious demeanor, the other young man, his face turned towards a young girl who follows from behind with the rest of the company. Others are leading oxen, etc.; I'm ignoring these details. All this is not particularly interesting, and, with our habits of church paintings, ancient history, Shakespearean drama, or Greek mythology, one wonders if it's an inn sign that we have before our eyes, or a picture intended for the market. It didn't take a great effort of imagination, one says to oneself, for the painter to combine all this. And then, what's the point of all these trivialities? Let's go to the fair, to the stable, we'll see just as much. Yet these people are talking, their words are interchanged; we can, from their faces, guess if not what they are saying, at least what they are thinking. Perhaps this will interest us more. The man with the pig defines himself by his attire. He is a small village landowner who, as early as spring, thinks about his winter provisions. He was part of the conscription from eighteen to twenty-five, in 1793, and he saw the Rhine: it was from there that he brought back the habit of smoking. He went to the fair (in Besançon), first to buy for an infant, then to collect the quarter due from a small pension he earned in the war against the émigrés. Returning from his campaigns, he has resumed a rustic life, and you would hardly guess in him a hero of the republic. His air has nothing martial about it: back home, the French soldier finds himself as much a Gros-Jean as before. However, make no mistake, as you see him, busy with his pig, clenching his pipe between his teeth, the good man has fixed opinions: it's a fault he acquired in 1889; he is stubborn: if the tremors of the Revolution are not to his liking, he harbors even more resentment against the old regime, and when the July Days of 1830 come, he will be among the first to rally to the tricolor against the priests and the nobles.

The middle-aged man, who returns on horseback, is the wealthy

peasant, mayor of his commune, at the head of a large farm. He is an official figure, and who, beneath his smock, knows how to maintain his rank, speaking little and with discretion, holding moderate opinions, and, moreover, liking to cover his responsibility under a higher authority. Great ambitious people are rare in France; It is remarkable that the generals of the Republic all had only the desire for power, except for one, who by race, language, and domestic education was not French: Napoleon Bonaparte. The grave and reserved face of our mayor perfectly betrays the positive spirit of this rustic complacent, a man of order, proud of the beauty of his horses, who knows the proverb: "As good as the beast, so good is the man"; and who, a property-restricted elector, deeming it beneath his dignity to make...

The opposition votes for the ministerial candidate. – He is accompanied by his son, a young man, whom he has just insured against the risk of conscription, and who, for his part, has no desire in the least to become a son of Victory. There is no man in the world less eager for the laurels of Mars than the French peasant. This one, from the top of his horse, exchanges a smile with the peasant woman on foot. Is she his fiancée? No: the fiancée of the mayor's son would not travel alone, on foot, lost in the crowd. Is she his mistress? No more. In matters of marriage, the Franche-Comté peasant takes things slowly; misalliance is as unpleasant to him as it is to the bourgeois and the noble. As for free love, he thinks twice; he fears the scandal and the inconveniences; Above all, he doesn't flaunt them, and as long as you see him being gallant, be sure there's nothing. For her part, the young girl, while smiling at a testimony that does her honor, knows how to impose silence on her heart: she hardly believes in such a disproportionate marriage, and for her to engage in relationships of another kind, she would have to have already come a long way!

Here is the peasant of Franche-Comté; let's say rather: here is the French peasant, in the sincerity of his nature, thirty or forty years from the Revolution, in one of the thousand scenes of provincial life. This is rustic France, with its indecisive mood and positive spirit, its simple language, its gentle passions, its unembellished style, its thoughts closer to the earth than to the clouds, its morals equally distant from democracy and demagogy, its decided preference for common ways, far removed from any idealistic

exaltation, happy when it can preserve its honest mediocrity under a tempered authority, in that happy medium so dear to good people, and which, alas! constantly betrays them. What characterizes our people; what you will find in all classes of French society, without distinction of fortune, age, or sex, before the rage of the century has altered its natural character, is a moderate temperament, a uniform character, equal morals, no ambition for command, even less disposition to revolt, and the deepest antipathy for anything that deviates from the vulgar path. In The Peasants of Flagey, everyone, from their own point of view, within their own circle of ideas and interests, can call themselves a supporter of the golden mean: the mayor, in the exercise of his authority, is a golden mean; the old soldier, in his assessment of the governments that have succeeded one another since 1889, criticizing and blaming in turn the Republic, the Emperor, the Bourbons, skeptical, distrustful, not knowing for whom to take a stand, is also a supporter of the golden mean; the young man and the young woman, finally, at the moment when their hearts seem to leap towards each other, on the flame of their gaze, remain in

the environment that their sentiment, more prudent than passionate, assigns them. Certainly, the foreigner who had learned to know us only through the masterpieces of our literature, then through the scenario of our Revolution, through the Marseillaise, the Victories and Conquests, the speeches of our tribunes, the language of our journalists and our traveling salesmen, would have difficulty recognizing native Frenchmen in the very exact and very truthful effigy that we have just analyzed: "How much," he would say to himself, "this race is below that painted by L. Robert in his Harvesters! What common physiognomies! What an absence of distinction, of nobility in all these figures!..." Yet this is our origin; this is the stock from which our fathers sprang, and upon which our posterity will continue to flourish, provided, however, that the worm of modern corruption has not already bitten us to death. A singular race, capable of all the impulses of genius, all the outbursts of passion, all the sublimity of enthusiasm, all the infatuations of novelty itself, but which always returns with delight to its honest environment, to the calm of its habits, the moderation of its opinions, the indecision of its temperament.

We are undoubtedly not today, especially in Paris, as I tried to

portray ourselves in order to explain Courbet's painting. Our political happy medium has resulted in a shameful dismissal. This esteem for mediocrity that distinguished our fathers has given way to the impatience of industrialism and the greed of profiteering: we have stripped away our Gallic common sense for pretentious phraseology full of sophistry, and the eccentricity of pleasures makes us find the modesty of old morals insipid. French gallantry, once so vaunted, was a form of civility beneath which hid reason, mistress of love, and from which, along with the sanctity of families, came strength of character. Now we have acquired other habits: gallantry among gentlemen is no laughing matter, and coquetry among ladies has its significance. The peasant, like the city dweller, pursues above all, in marriage, money, and seeks compensation for his passion in the corruption of servants and daughters of the people. Cowardice of conscience is the fruit of cowardice in love.

But this incessant transformation of morals and ideas is precisely the principal condition and, consequently, the guarantee of the perpetuity of the new art.

At the same time that we demand, in the higher interest of social education, faithful representations of ourselves, we insist that these same representations become historical records for posterity.

Suppose that the author of The Peasants of Flagey had raised, as they say, these truthful figures with a ray of idealism, ennobling their gestures, enhancing their attitudes: the effect would have been lacking. He would have created a pleasant painting like that of L. Robert: that is to say, we would have, in addition, a false work, classical or romantic in its conception, but banal in its elegance, common with his research; a work without originality, without scope, without ideas, worthless for art, useless to the men of the present and those of the future. Ah! what would we not give to contemplate today in their private lives, in their domestic occupations and household affairs, the Romans of the time of Fabricius and the Scipios; the Greeks of Solon, Themistocles, Pericles; the Carthaginians of Hannibal and the Gauls of Vercingetorix! What a commentary on history! What a revelation for the science of morals! Perhaps we, in turn, will disappear from the world's stage: what is indubitable is that within a few centuries we will have changed. In three hundred years, our posterity will

resemble us no more than the Flemings and Dutch of today resemble, in costume, thoughts, and morals, the contemporaries of Rubens and Rembrandt. Do you believe that then paintings like Courbet's will not acquire, in the eyes of future generations, as family mementos, and apart from the artist's talent, a hundred times more value than all the fantasies and illustrations of David, Delacroix, and Ingres? The painting of the Peasants at Flagey is, in the judgment of those who support the new painting with their approval, one of Courbet's best. Exhibited at the 1851 Salon, along with The Stone Breakers and The Burial at Ornans, which we will discuss later, "it provoked cries of surprise, repugnance, and admiration," said one critic. "Courbet had just struck hard like a Hercules at a fair. The critics were indignant in the name of nobility, elegance of style, and all the commandments of the Academy." I do not wish to argue about nobility, elegance, pose, style, gesture, or anything that constitutes the execution of a work of art and which is the usual subject of old criticism. I would even be quite willing to declare that I understand absolutely nothing about these things, and that I am pleased about it. Courbet possesses, as an artist, powerful qualities that are rarely denied him; He also has his faults, which I do not intend to credit him with. I would be very surprised if he did not have some, and even very serious ones. As much as he is a follower of the Dutch school, Courbet is innovative, radically innovative; he does not yet know himself well, and I will provide proof of this; he is not supported, enlightened, or corrected by the public, who understand him no better than he does.

understands classical and romantic painting, and doesn't know where he's going with it; neither by criticism, literally blind; nor by the masters. How could he not stumble at every moment? What art, then, was produced at the first attempt by works beyond reproach? Do we forget that in the Greece of Pericles, in that of Alexander, the statues that most attracted the devotion of the crowd were the oldest, figures without movement, without gesture, without ideal, almost formless, the first attempts at religion and art? Well! I tell you, we are witnessing at this moment the birth of something that, in painting, will be greater than anything left by the ancients and the moderns, if our madness does not succeed in stifling it. Nescio quid majus nascitur Iliad. What I ask, therefore, is that we not judge the innovator with the prejudice he seeks to destroy; that we apply

a new critique to a new art; that we appreciate it in itself, like the philosopher who, having to critique an idea, a theory, a system, is careful not to judge this system according to its conformity or non-conformity with any other; he takes it at its principle; he ensures its logic; he verifies whether it contains no contradictions, whether it accounts for all the facts, whether it answers all the problems posed by philosophy.

What is art and what is its social purpose?

As we have said, ART is an idealistic representation of nature and of ourselves, with a view to the physical and moral improvement of our species. According to this definition, which presupposes in the human mind an aesthetic or idealistic faculty, just as legislation presupposes in us a legal faculty, we have reviewed the various manifestations of art from the most ancient times to the present day; we have noted that such has indeed been the goal and effect of art, whatever form it took and whatever its means; that it has fallen each time it has forgotten its highly moral and hygienic mission; that as the ideal has spread with the progress of reason, art has had to renew its means at different times, and that we have arrived precisely at one of those times when, previous idealism being meaningless and unintelligible, a complete renovation of art is necessary. This idealism no longer consists of vain personifications, which the abstract power of our languages and our methods of reasoning have rendered useless; nor in representations of either the beauty of the body or the sanctity of the soul, beauty and sanctity that artistic contemplation strived to elevate to the ideal: this search for perfection is

henceforth considered by us as chimerical, useless, and therefore contrary to practical reason and the purpose of art. Our idealism consists in teaching ourselves, in improving ourselves day by day, not according to types conceived a priori and more or less ingeniously depicted, but according to the data constantly provided by experience and philosophical observation. Under these conditions, the artist's work cannot, under the pretext of nobility or coarseness, exclude anything; it embraces within its framework, unlimited like progress itself, all human life, happy and unhappy, all the feelings, all the thoughts of humanity. What! You speak of the ideal, and your idealism, powerless to make nature speak, rests only on the chimeras of your imagination, on the abstractions of

your mind and the impotent ebullitions of your heart! For, finally, your gods, your saints, your great men, all these historical, magical, dramatic, allegorical, romantic, and chivalrous figures, even all those closest to reality that you depict in your landscapes, your seascapes, your genre paintings—what is all this if not imagination, abstraction, chimera, and, moreover, an admission of impotence? You speak of invention, of creation, of freedom! And all you have ever done is drag yourself along in the wake of mythologists, theosophists, poets, novelists, fabliaux, historiographers, as if art existed only to illustrate revelation, epic, comedy, or history; as if the artist were incapable of thinking for himself, of choosing his types, of producing his ideas!

What! You have before you men, your compatriots, your contemporaries, your brothers, beings who think, who act, who suffer, who love, who have passions, interests, ideas, in which the ideal finally breathes, and your brush, classical or romantic, elegant and noble, disdains them! You pretend not to notice them! You wouldn't know what to do with them! You give us in their place theatrical heroes, characters from novels, virgins from paradise, or, what amounts to almost the same thing for us, historical names, citizens of Morocco or Arabia, a phantasmagoria, Chinese shadows! Do you know the idea you bring to me with your so-called ideal? It's because you have no ideal at all, your soul is dry, you're only fit to make puppets, dolls, mannequins, fillers for the Charivari or figurines for the fashion magazine. Form! We have plenty left; you've been told, there's nothing left for you to do in that area since the Greeks. What we're asking of you now is, through form, to show us the spirit. For that, I...

warn me, you need a power of idealism far greater than that which uncovered Venus's buttocks or Apollo's nose.

Yes, yes, Courbet has his faults; I'll spare you all of them, I've learned something from them myself. But let him be criticized on the basis of his idea, let him be judged according to the law he has made for himself; above all, let no one stir up onlookers against him, crying out that he is inelegant, ignoble! For, even if he were a hundred times more defective, with a single word he crushes you all, and this word, which I recorded from his lips, as profound as it is witty, is worth demonstrating one of his paintings: "You who claim to represent Charlemagne, Caesar, and Jesus Christ himself,

could you paint a portrait of your father?"

CHAPTER XIII

Continuation of the same subject: The Spinner; The Burial at Ornans; The Bather

It must be admitted: there is room today, in painting and statuary, not to mention the rest, I do not say for a great artist—great artists are welcome at all times—but for a revolution.

To paint men in the sincerity of their nature and their habits, in their works, in the fulfillment of their civic and domestic functions, with their current physiognomy, especially without posing; to surprise them, so to speak, in the undress of their consciences, not simply for the pleasure of mocking, but as a goal of general education and as an aesthetic warning: this seems to me to be the true starting point of modern art. This does not exclude, in the future, exhibitions more flattering to our self-esteem, more idealized, since that is how we understand the ideal; but, I make no secret of it, I do not expect to see anything similar; I do not believe that, in the current climate, neither Courbet nor anyone else will succeed. Let us humble ourselves under the weight of our unworthiness. It is not such a small thing to know how to show ourselves as we are: in all these respects, I dare say that apart from the finished execution, about which I say nothing, because a revolution in the thought of art implies a revolution in the manner, and in this respect everything remains to be done, Courbet's painting is far more serious and of a higher aim than almost anything left by the Dutch school. Now that we know what to make of the new reform, we can assess its results with full knowledge of the facts and express our feelings about them. It would be a work of art if it were possible for the public to remain unaware of its movements. We remember the reform undertaken by Boileau against the bad taste of his century; but Boileau would not have succeeded if he had not been supported, as his efforts progressed,

contemporaries. Let us therefore continue our review, and let us have no doubt that the day the public, initiated into the superior thought of the new school, will be interested in it, the day the common sense of the masses will have won this great victory over traditional bad taste, art will resume its upward march, and its influence on the public mind will be incalculable.

The Spinner The Peasants Returning from the Fair is related, by analogy of the idea, to The Sleeping Spinner, an excellent painting in which Courbet once again showed how, in scenes of popular life, he understands the purpose and dignity of art. Give another this simple subject, the Sleeping Spinner, and I would be greatly deceived if, obeying the preoccupations of the old school and the detestable taste of the time, he doesn't create for you a little person with the face of a nymph, a slender waist, slender legs, and nimble fingers, as literary men repeat ad nauseam when they speak of the labors of the worker; in short, a real doll, a peasant girl from Florian and the Opera. Nor will he forget to lift the skirt a little, to spread the thigh, to uncover the throat, in short, to give the sleeper's abandon all possible grace. A sleeping spinner cannot be in the severe attire of the housewife holding the broom. Besides, shouldn't the artist excite you, awaken in you a certain ideal? Without this, you wouldn't care about his spinner: what do the distaff and art have in common? The critic whose opinion I quoted above about Return from the Fair says of The Spinner: "A simple, solid, black, and heavy figure." It is clear that, looking through fashionable spectacles, he mistook an effect intended by the artist for a defect, and understood nothing of it. But let us leave these people to their imaginations, as absurd, as ugly as they are indecent.

Courbet, who has not seen the gods, who knows only men, excels in rendering physiological beauty, with its rich blood, its powerful and calm life; a beauty which, represented and fixed by art, produces on the senses an effect analogous to that of the ideal beauty of Greek statues. This is because truth is also an ideal, which in itself frees us from the titillations of the flesh and the storms of lust, and which only a depraved imagination can make dangerous. What a magnificent creature this spinner is, and how she sleeps! The thread has fallen from her hand; one thinks one can hear her slow

breathing instead of the hum of the spinning wheel. Every day she rises early in the morning; she goes to bed last: her functions are multiplied by her incessant action,

tedious: it's in spare moments that she takes up her distaff, a minuscule task whose tenuousness and small noise could not keep the robust country girl awake. Do you understand now why Courbet made his spinner a straightforward peasant? Without that, she would be going against the grain; I say more, she would fall into indecency. Chatelaines stopped spinning a long time ago; bourgeois women have never spun; the workers of the big cities haven't even learned; spinning mills have been built that exempt them from it; so they wouldn't earn a living from it. All of them, moreover, are artists; they would only endure the tedious distaff if coquetry found its place there, behind a window, with a view of the boulevard. There you would see them, with a nimble and light hand, pulling their flax. Take her out of her village, out of her rural home: the idea of the spinner succumbing to sleep will be nothing more than an image of domestic laziness; consequently, as I said earlier and as the logic of our false taste dictates, a provocation to lust. Courbet's spinner is dark, well-seated, well-collared; she has a powerful waist, robust arms, well-fed fingers, a candid face; in the midst of sleep, her habits of modesty will not betray her. Truth alone could here, banishing all impure thought, suggest both an idea and an ideal, outside of which art, reduced to the arbitrary, to insignificance, disappears. The Burial at Ornans It is, above all, in The Burial that Courbet's thought has revealed itself with the most audacity: I do not even exclude The Return from the Conference, which I will discuss below. This work has generally been given due credit for the artist's talent and the energy of his brush; and this talent must be very real for critics to have allowed themselves to make such admissions: for, as for the subject itself and the manner in which it is treated, they have understood nothing at all. The author of French Artists Studied from Nature, Mr. Th. Sylvestre, has given The Burial a description that is a caricature. And, I will admit, the contrast between the figures and the pious motif that unites them is so violent that I do not think, whatever we heralds and popularizers of the new idea may say, that the public will be able to understand and endure such a lesson for long, nor can the artist count on the approval of the masses for such attempts.

Of all life's acts, the most serious, the one that lends itself least to irony, is the one that ends it: death. If anything must remain sacred, it might as well be.

For the believer and the unbeliever alike, these are the last moments, the will, the solemn farewells, the funeral, the tomb. All peoples have felt the majesty of these scenes; all have surrounded them with religion. The same sentiment has always inspired artists who, in this case, perhaps the only one, have been able to both obey the ideal of their time and remain in the eternal truth of their mission. It seems that no artistic aberration is possible in this heartbreaking solemnity, where a family, surrounded by friends and relatives, assisted by the clergy, will seal the great separation by returning to the earth the corpse of a husband, a father. How then did Courbet delight in shrouding such a scene in ridicule, in rendering its actors grotesque? Note that the scene takes place in Ornans, a small town in Franche-Comté, among simple peasants, in an environment where religion remains, where faith is not entirely dead: which makes the artist's idea even more inconceivable and almost makes it a sacrilege. Look at this gravedigger with his flattened, brute face; these unscrupulous and naughty choirboys; these vergers with pimply noses, who, for a few sous, left their vineyards and came to appear in the funeral drama; these priests, blasé about burials as well as baptisms, galloping distractedly through the indispensable De Profundis: what a sad and distressing spectacle! A beautiful thing to display for all to see, isn't it? For whom then did M. Courbet intend this painting? Where would one find the space for it? It's certainly not in a church, where it would be an insult; nor in a school, nor in a town hall, nor in a theater. Only a great lord, avid for curiosities, could think of collecting it in his attic; he would be careful not to place it in his drawing room. No doubt there are over there, on the other side of the pit, some very touching female figures, with whom you are almost tempted to cry; but these cold spectators, this bored gentleman, an old acquaintance of the family, who could not avoid attending the funeral of a friend, a deceased protégé: does all this not indicate sacrilegious premeditation? Where can we find the purpose, the moral thought of art there?... Well, this criticism, which is so easy to accuse, is the very justification of Courbet. In what century are we living? I ask the hypocrites who accuse him. Have you never attended a funeral ceremony, and have you not observed what goes

on there? We have lost the religion of the dead; we no longer understand the sublime poetry with which Christianity, in agreement with itself, surrounded it; we have no faith in prayers, and we mock the afterlife. The death of man today, in universal thought, is like that of the beast: Unus est finis hominis et jumenti; and despite the

Requiem, despite the catafalque, despite the bells, despite the church and all its decorum, we treat the remains of one as those of the other. Why a funeral? Why sepulchers? What do these marbles, these crosses, these inscriptions, these wreaths of immortelles signify? Isn't the cart that, on the orders of the police, will take the body and carry it... to Montfaucon enough for you? It is this hideous plague of modern immorality that Courbet dared to show naked; and the picture he painted of it is as eloquent as a sermon on the same subject by Bridaine or Bossuet could be. There, he tells us, I see only one thing that is respectable: the tears of mothers, sisters, wives; it is the ignorance of children. Everything else is comedy, and, as you say, sacrilege. Now, you would not perceive this sacrilege, rotten and cadaverous souls that you are, if painting did not force it into your consciousness, through the very horror of the representation. This is why, you should know, Lamennais wanted to be thrown into the common grave, like a dog, without ceremony or procession. – Since our police laws do not allow a friend to bury his friend's body in secret, thought the author of Indifference, let us at least elude indiscreet curiosity, and let the common undertaker be done with it!… Courbet has thus shown himself, in the painting of The Burial, as profound a moralist as he is a profound artist; he has given you the bloody, pitiless truth; by revolting the ideal within you, he reminds you of your dignity; and if he did not create a flawless work, he created one that was incontestably salutary and original, which we would have judged prodigious if we had the slightest feeling for art left, if our soul, our reason, our intelligence, our conscience were not, so to speak, struck with anesthesia. What weight do all the reservations of the most malicious critic have here? "The composition of The Burial violates all the rules... the figures form a sort of disordered bas-relief... the heads, too pronounced in the background, come to the forefront?..." I grant you all you want. Is it any less true that Courbet opened up a new and immense perspective in art; That an idea like the Burial is in itself a revelation, and that the idealistic excitement that results

from it is so powerful that one ends up finding that the artist has not yet done enough, just as the Greeks found that the figures of their gods were never beautiful enough, and that one would want to submit a subject so new, so accusatory, and so moving to the competition twenty times?

The Bather

Let's talk about the famous Bather, which aroused a general disapproval of the so-called realist school, a clamor that still haunts Courbet. I was one of the first, I may say, to applaud "this powerfully rendered heap of material, which cynically turns its back on the viewer." Note this: despite sarcasm, disgust, and condemnation, a certain praise is always found in Courbet's favor in the pen of critics. Well then! Gentlemen, sworn appraisers, reviewers, experts of the mainstream press, tell me, seriously, what you find fault with in this new invention? Is the drawing lacking, or the color? Is there no substance, and, as they say in the studio, no touch? You don't like it: why? Deduce your reasons for it. Oh! You would prefer, as we know, a nymph by Pradier or Clésinger, in an impossible pose, under the goad of Eros; an odalisque by M. Ingres, or any other aphrodisiac mirror. Your serials, your novels, your short verses, bear witness to both your ethics and your aesthetics. But is it only the vulgar or millionaire Venus, in her chemise or rolled up, who can be appreciated by you? Will not this honest woman, who comes out of the bath and lets herself be seen from behind, without thinking anything wrong, find favor in your eyes? Let us forget, for a moment, your epicurean delights, and reason.

"She's ugly, she disgusts you," you claim. - Let's not exaggerate: we are dealing here with art, not voluptuousness. That the woman Courbet shows you here, in an attitude as reserved as nudity requires, is nothing less than an ideal beauty is possible: nor was that the painter's intention. Plump and plump, broad of rump and full of neckline, dark and shiny, she was certainly never mistaken for a Diana or a Hebe. Note, however, that she is neither hunchbacked, nor lopsided, nor badly built; the world is full of beautiful women who, undressed, would certainly not be equal to her. How can you not see that what is ungainly here, even repugnant, and which you cannot even define, is an effect of art, a premeditation of the painter? But this is precisely what we're talking about: Unless we say that the artist didn't know what he

wanted and what he was doing, I wonder, what was Courbet's idea in painting this figure, with a truth, a realism, if you will, that nothing will ever surpass? Have you even asked yourself this question? I was told that at the 1853 Salon, where The Bather was exhibited for the first time, Empress Eugénie had just seen the painting, so

applauded, by Mademoiselle Rosa Bonheur, the Horse Market. Care had been taken to point out to Her Imperial Majesty, Andalusian, as we know, from the outset, that she should not judge our horse breeds by those of her country, and that what constituted the principal merit of the Horse Market, what made it interesting for national self-esteem, was the fidelity with which the artist had managed to render the most beautiful of our breeds, the Percheron breed. This, incidentally, proves that, as early as 1853, Courbet was not the only realist painter we had; that there were others who, without neglecting the ideal, cultivated reality, and, without suspecting it in the least, would have deserved just as much as he to be classified among the realists. From time immemorial, sculptors and painters have idealized the horse, man's noblest conquest, just as they idealized man himself. This proves the esteem we have held, from our earliest days, for this beautiful animal. But where is this ideal horse found? Who has seen it? We know the Limousin, Norman, Percheron, Andalusian, Arabian, Mecklenburg, and even Cossack horses; and in all these varieties there are superb examples; but there is no ideal horse: it is a pure convention... Arriving before the Bather, the Empress could not suppress a cry of surprise: Is this also a Percheron? she said. If I had been present, I would have taken the liberty of replying to Her Majesty, taking off my hat: No, madam; This one is a simple bourgeois woman, like many of us, and whose husband, a liberal under Louis-Philippe, a reactionary under the Republic, is currently one of the Emperor's most devoted subjects.

Yes, that's the fleshy and well-to-do bourgeoisie, deformed by fat and luxury; in whom softness and bulk stifle the ideal, and predestined to die of cowardice, if not of melted fat; that's what her stupidity, her selfishness, and her cuisine make her out to be. What grandeur! What opulence! She looks like a heifer awaiting the sacrifice. Compare the Bather and the Sleeping Spinner, and you will realize one thing: that between the peasantry and the

bourgeoisie, the fundamentals are absolutely the same, but that the difference in physiognomies created by morals is enormous. Doesn't this thickness of fat seem to you, in its flabby materiality, to render the artist's thought a thousand times better than the most learned allegory could? Nor La Fontaine's Raminagrobis, This cat playing the cat, This holy man of a cat, Well-furred, fat, and plump;

... nor the rat, so beautifully described by the same man, who, locked in a cheese, grew fat all around, approach the type created by Courbet. This cat and this rat are apologues, childish mischief; the other is high comedy. When I say bourgeoisie, one must be clear. It is not a class of citizens that I mean to condemn to the ridicule of the plebs; I am not getting political here: it is simply a drawback of certain habits that I am denouncing. Theology teaches that there are graces of state; there are also vices of state. Besides, painting is a bit like music: everyone has the right to see in it what they want; the essential thing for the painter is that one discovers something in it. This woman, whom I present to you here with her large behind, like the personification of the bourgeoisie, can become, at your discretion, something completely different. She could very well be a bluestocking, for example; I've seen some of that build: the exercise of the pen weighs a woman down just as much as a butcher's knife. She could be something even less estimable, and which is perfectly in keeping with our customs: a mother abbess. The courtesan is a glutton, a ghast, quickly turns to fat, and becomes enormous. All these varieties fall, as far as form is concerned, into the same type. The Russian general Murawief has patriotic Polish women whipped: he is a brutal man who doesn't know his trade. Courbet does worse to his victims: he paints them bare-bottomed, and the laughers are on his side. I know a zealot of the ideal who, fascinated by the incomparable energy of this painting, had the strange curiosity to become acquainted, as the Bible says, cognoscere, with the model. What did he find? This is what I forgot to ask him, and which is of little importance to us. Like a man who, lacking a mountain eye, looks from the top of a sheer rock into the depths of an abyss, this idealist was overcome with vertigo and, by Jove, bravely threw himself into it. I wish the painters of the Academy and the supporters of art for art's sake many triumphs like this.

CHAPTER XIV

Character of Art in the Beginning of the Period: Definition of the New School

We will resume our examination of Courbet's paintings; before going further, let us try to determine the character of art in the period we entered ten or fifteen years ago, and to define the new school. We have said that art has its principle and its raison d'être in a special faculty of man, the aesthetic faculty. It consists, we added, in a more or less idealized representation of ourselves and of things, with a view to our moral and physical improvement.

It follows from this that art cannot exist outside of truth and justice; that science and morality are its leaders; that it is even only an auxiliary to them; that consequently its first law is respect for morality and rationality. The old school, on the contrary, both classical and romantic, maintained, and distinguished philosophers have sided with this opinion, that art is independent of any moral and philosophical condition, that it subsists by itself, like the faculty that gives rise to it: it is this opinion that must now be examined thoroughly, for it is this which creates all the difficulty between the schools.

Does art, then, think? Does it know? Does it reason? Does it conclude?... To this categorical question, the romantic school, even bolder than its rival, answered no less categorically: NO, making what it calls fantasy, genius, inspiration, suddenness, and which is nothing other than systematic ignorance, the essential condition of art. To know nothing, to abstain from reasoning, to refrain from reflecting, which would cool the spirit and cause the loss of inspiration; To abhor philosophy has been the maxim of the advocates of art for art's sake. We do not condemn science in itself, they say; we do perfect justice to its usefulness, its honor, and we are not the

last to illustrate its representatives. We only claim that it is of no help to art; that it is even fatal to it. Art is entirely spontaneous; it is unconscious of itself; it is unaware of itself: it is pure intuition; it knows not what leads it, nor what it is doing, nor where it is going. Let others put sequence, logic into its manifestations; let them seek the reason, let them show the connection: this is a matter of philosophy, which one may find very plausible, but which really has nothing to do with the artist. The Muse, universal faculty, divine breath, incoercible, rebellious to analysis as well as to discipline, visits now this one, now that one; it is she who says to each one: You will be an artist! Happy is the predestined one whom she covers with her wings! he will steal the admiration of men and conquer immortality. But it is in vain that he would try to retain, with the chains of meditation, the celestial spirit; it is in vain that he would seek to command it in the name of a theory: dialectics will make it flee, and forever. The most ignorant of men may have a happy inspiration; the foolhardy man who, through philosophy, through criticism, through pure reason, believes he can seize it, will never succeed.

This exclusion of science from the domain of art extends to morality. – Art exists in itself, they further say; it is independent of the notions of justice and virtue; it is freedom in its absolutism. Without doubt, and we do not deny it, what is moral is worthy of all praise, and what is criminal is worthy of reprobation. We have never claimed that art can change the nature and quality of things, make crime a virtue, or make morally good what is morally bad. We say that art, as art, is free from all moral considerations as from all philosophical study; so that it can manifest itself, develop in superstition and debauchery, as in science and sanctity, produce masterpieces on immoral and absurd subjects, neither more nor less than in the celebration of ideas and all civic and domestic virtues. Thus, because Jules Romain and others created, with marvelous talent, obscene paintings, because Parny and Voltaire wrote, one The War of the Gods, the other The Maid, people imagined that art could be self-sufficient, and that, all else extinguished, it would have the power to revive the corpse and ennoble humanity. They deluded themselves into the grossest sophism. They failed to understand that works like those I have just cited are monsters, where the ugliness of the subject is arbitrarily married to a beautiful form, but one long ago given and discovered. The question, in fact,

is not whether artists like Voltaire and Jules Romain, who came after the complete development of

language, literature, and art, can do what they please with their style and their brush: the question is whether language and art would have reached, under the influence of works like The Maid and engravings like those of Aretino, the point of perfection at which these great artists found them. The creators of the French language, let us not forget, are Malherbe, Corneille, Boileau, Pascal, Bossuet, and others like them, the most severe, the most precise, and the most chaste of geniuses. Let us judge the rest by this analogy. The question of the independence of art leads to another: that of its end or its destination. On this point, as on the previous one, the old school is no less explicit and decisive. According to the classics and the romantics, whom it would be inconsistent to separate, art is its own end. Manifestation of beauty and the ideal, what other purpose could one assign to it than that of pleasing, of amusing? It is repugnant to any utilitarian purpose. If it promotes morality, if it aids health, if it contributes to wealth, so much the better for them; the statesman may use it as a basis to impose certain police restrictions on art; but it in no way follows that art recognizes a suzerainty outside of its nature. The ordinances of the legislator have their motive; they must be respected; as a citizen, the artist submits to them; as an interpreter of the ideal, he cares nothing for them. His sole aim, by sharing with you his personal impressions, whatever they may be, is to excite in you that intimate delight which doubles the enjoyment of reality, which very often replaces its possession. What does the morality of the fact or its logic matter here? What does the value, economic or moral, of the thing matter? You are seduced, passionate, transported: that's all the artist wants. The rest is beyond his competence, beyond his responsibility.

I won't waste my time refuting this theory, founded on an ambiguity, and which everyone today can judge by its results; for it is this theory which, for sixty years, to go no further back, has constantly caused art to decline and lost it.

The human soul is constituted in a sort of polarity: CONSCIENCE and Science, in other words JUSTICE and Truth. On this fundamental axis, as on their dominant, gravitate the other faculties: memory, imagination, judgment, speech, love, politics,

industry, commerce, art. What has confused artists, or, rather, those who provided them with this false aesthetic, is that they misunderstood this constitution. They saw in the human soul a triad in which feeling, aesthetics, figured, according to them, as the third term, equal to the other two; while there is truly only one

dyad, or, as I said earlier, a polarity, in which art can no longer be considered anything other than an auxiliary function. The proof of this subordination of art to consciousness and science is that, as we have demonstrated previously (chap. XI), in everything that is pure science and law, the idea and the ideal are identical and adequate; that in this respect the role of art becomes null, and that it only comes into play with regard to particular objects, individuals and their actions, whose proper idea, that is to say, the form, figure or image, necessarily different from the type or the law, is different from the ideal. So that science and conscience are in us the two sources of the ideal, that is, of the faculty we have to consider things according to their law, and to strive to bring them back to it, and that an art that declared itself independent of science and morality would go against its own principle: it would be a contradiction.

I will not dwell further on this subject: I would have to repeat what I said about the historical evolution of art, an evolution in which we have seen it follow civilization step by step, and be rudely dismissed when it deviated from it; what I then said about the irrationality of art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an irrationality which, degenerating into orgy and debauchery, ended up killing even genius. I am content to reestablish the true principle here, leaving the remainder to the reader's intelligence.

It is against this degrading theory of art for art's sake that Courbet and, with him, the entire school hitherto called realist, rise up loudly and protest energetically. "No," he says, "I am translating Courbet's thought here from his works, rather than quoting it from his speeches, no, it is not true that the sole end of art is pleasure, for pleasure is not an end; it is not true that it has no other end than itself, for everything is connected, everything is linked, everything is interdependent, everything has an end in humanity and in nature: the idea of a faculty without a goal, of a principle without a consequence, of a cause without an effect, is as absurd as that of an effect without a cause. The purpose of art is to lead us to self-

knowledge by revealing all our thoughts, even the most secret, all our tendencies, our virtues, our vices, our absurdities, and thereby to contribute to the development of our dignity, to the perfection of our being. It was not given to us to feed us with chimeras, intoxicate us with illusions, deceive us, and mislead us with mirages, as the classicists, the romantics, and all the followers of a vain ideal understand; but to deliver us from these pernicious illusions by denouncing them.

It does not follow from this, I would say in turn, that the work of art must assume an air of rudeness, scolding, and displeasure, or pose as a raging divinity. Beauty and grace are essentially its domain; they take precedence over the coarse and the ugly. This is why we have seen art, in the youth of societies, strive with all its might to represent things, according to Raphael's expression, not precisely as he saw them, but as he would have wanted them to be, surrounded by a halo of love, more beautiful than nature, in a word, ideal. This was the infancy of art, if you will; but childhood loves beauty, and it knows what it is. Are you then going to put childhood outside of human life? And note this, in the justification of the ancient artists: as humanity frees itself from vice, tyranny, and misery, we will see the human figure, I mean the figure of living man, illuminate itself, gradually approaching the effigy it once made for itself, as its model; thus realizing in its own flesh its ancient ideal, and bringing its new creations back to it. This final result is inevitable, unless we deny all kinds of progress. We are far from this future, no doubt: thirty centuries of false civilization, piled on our heads, demand other care from us. Having said all this, we can try to define the new school and clarify its idea. For this, the first four paintings we have just examined will suffice. Courbet's works are not caricatures or accusations: his supporters and opponents all recognize that he remains within the real truth, even making this realism, some reproachful, others praising it. It is not satire, although he does not lack satirical ideas; but it does not exhaust his thought; it is only a variety in his work, as it is a variety, a genre apart, in the works of Boileau and Horace. It is impossible to find a satirical allusion in Return from the Fair. Courbet does not proceed by hyperbole, derision, or invective; his irony does not degenerate into slander; he is without hatred or flattery. If, as an artist, he reveals a certain brutal anger, it is not against the subjects he paints, against the vices or the ridiculous he

attacks; It is against his colleagues, stubbornly following a false path. In this respect, it was right to say that by sending The Burial, The Bather, etc., to the exhibitions of 1851 and 1853, he struck like a Hercules at a fair.

Nor could he be called a genre painter, in the manner of the Dutch and the Flemish, whose paintings, pleasant or comic, but light, rarely get to the heart of things, betraying no preoccupation.

philosophical, and reveal more imagination than observation. Could one cite a Teniers who was within Courbet's range? I couldn't say: in any case, I would reply that Teniers anticipated his time; which is not without example among artists. The paintings of the painter from Ornans are mirrors of truth, whose merit, hitherto unrecognizable, apart from the qualities and defects of the execution, lies in the depth of the idea, the fidelity of the types, the purity of the mirror, and the power of the reflection. This painting aims higher than art itself; its motto is the inscription from the temple of Delphi: Men, know yourselves, concluding, by way of implication, with John the Baptist, and amend yourselves, if you value life and honor. Will it finally be said, with the writers of the new school, that these paintings are pure realisms? Beware, I will reply: your realism would compromise the truth, which you nevertheless profess to serve. The real is not the same thing as the true; the former is understood rather as matter, the latter as the laws that govern it; the latter alone is intelligible, and as such can serve as the object and goal of art; the latter has no meaning in itself. The old schools left the truth through the door of the ideal; do not go exiting them in your turn through the door of the real. – You cite, as evidence of your realism, ancient masterpieces, such as the busts of Nero and Vitellius, which you contrast with the flattered and mendacious busts of Caesar and Napoleon by M. Clésinger. I readily acknowledge the great distance between the work of the Roman artist and that of the French practitioner; as much as I admire one, the other inspires little interest in me. But, before concluding that the two antiques are realist, observe first that you are not in a position to compare the portraits with the originals; secondly, that the great merit of these busts is that their creator did not just copy his models, which a molder could have done just as well; he has rendered, without departing from the truth, the physiognomy, the air, that I know not what which makes

a portrait strike you, which does not result from the material, and which is the spirit. This is undoubtedly, if the criticism you make of the busts of Mr. Clésinger, which I have not seen, is correct, what this artist will not have learned to do, and at which those of eighteen centuries ago excelled: it was for him, as for the ancients, to show us the souls of the two emperors; he only knew how to straighten the features of their faces; according to the Greek canon. Physical reality, remember, is only worth the spirit, the ideal which breathes within it, and which does not consist only in a certain symmetry or elegance of form. Are you then, by dint of seeking reality, sacrificing spirit to matter, like the worshippers of form, by dint of seeking

the ideal, have sacrificed truth to a chimera?

I conclude then, and this from your own assessments, that to execute a portrait, let alone a scene from social life, the intervention of the ideal is absolutely indispensable: not once again that it is a matter for the artist of remaking, correcting, and embellishing the work of nature and society, perhaps of crime; but precisely in order to preserve in the figures the truth, the life, the spirit of their physiognomy. This is what Courbet meant, who, if he often expresses himself poorly, understands himself very well, in this challenge he threw down to his adversaries: You who undertake to paint Caesars and Charlemagnes, could you paint a portrait of your father?

Since the ideal is essential to art, both according to the new school and according to the earlier schools, and since reality figures in all of them only as raw material, substance or support of form, idea, and ideal, it is not at all by its realism that this school must be defined; it is by the manner in which it, in turn, makes the ideal function. Egyptian art was, because of its ideal, typical, symbolic, metaphysical; Greek art was, for the same reason, idolatrous, devoted to the cult of form; Christian art was, in turn, by the Gospel, spiritualistic and ascetic; that of the Renaissance is ambiguous, half pagan, half Christian, with a strange effect; finally, Dutch art, emerging from democracy and free thought, freed from all mythology, allegory, idolatry, spirituality, from all hierarchical respect; accepting the people as its subject, its type, its sovereign, and its ideal, has deserved to be defined by us as human art. But this designation, more revolutionary than philosophical, excellent

for marking the transition that suddenly separated the Catholic and feudal world from the world of science and freedom, is no longer sufficient; it is not distinctive enough; it lacks a horizon for us, suggesting that art now has nothing to do but continue the Dutch, while it is clear that it has already surpassed them. As for the idealists of fantasy who, under the names of classics and romantics, occupy the entire period between the Revolution and the Second Empire, this cannot even be discussed here: they have no more ideals than pure realists would have, if any existed. Thus, the question, in order to define the new school and determine the new character of art, is reduced to stating the general nature of the idealism to which it must henceforth refer. First of all, I note that the artistic ideal among the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Christians, and even during the Renaissance, corresponds to a religious dogma, of which it is only the translation; it pivots on this...

dogma; it brings all its inventions back to it, more or less. We can therefore call it, generally speaking, dogmatic idealism. Since the Lutheran-Dutch Reformation, a priori dogma has given way to free thought; art has taken its ideal everywhere, in the infinity of nature and humanity and in the contemplation of their splendors and their laws; and it has gravitated, no longer, as before, towards a supreme ideal, the source of all its inspirations, the center of all its idealities, but towards a goal superior to it, a goal that goes beyond the proper sphere of art, the progressive education of the human race. We can therefore say with accuracy that the decentralized, universal, natural, and human idealism that governs the new art is antidogmatic. This purely negative epithet must be transformed into an affirmative equivalent, so we will say: critical idealism, critical school. Unfortunately, I fear that the somewhat arbitrary susceptibility of our language does not allow us to use the same term critical art; I therefore propose, for those of difficult taste, that we use, with the word art, the adjective rational, sufficiently motivated by the irrationality of art during the first half of this century, and which means roughly the same thing as critical.

Just as there has existed, since Descartes and Kant, an anti-dogmatic or critical philosophy; just as, following the example of this philosophy, literature has become, in turn, and primarily critical; so art, developing parallel to philosophy, science, industry, politics, and literature, was also to renew itself in criticism. Criticism, from

the Greek krinô, I judge. Critical art, as one might say, the art of vindication, art which begins by taking justice into its own hands, by declaring itself the servant, not of the absolute, but of pure reason and law; art which is no longer content with expressing or giving rise to impressions, symbolizing ideas or acts of faith; but which, in turn, uniting conscience and science with feeling, discerns, discusses, blames, or approves in its own way; art which, to the definitions of philosophy and morality, adds its own sanction, the sanction of the beautiful and the sublime; art which, consequently, rallying itself to the movement of civilization, by adopting its principles, is incapable of perverting itself through the abuse of the ideal, and of becoming itself an instrument and instigator of corruption. Art tells us, through the organ of the new school, its interpreter: Such a thought, such an action, such a habit, such an institution, is declared, by law and by philosophy, true or false, just or unjust, virtuous or guilty, useful or harmful; I will demonstrate in my turn, by the means at my disposal, that this same action is still beautiful or ugly, generous or ignoble, graceful or...

brutal, spiritual, or stupid, suave or sad, harmonious or charivaric: so that when you have gathered on the same object the testimony of science, the judgment of justice, and the sanction of art, you will have the highest certainty about this object, and you will love it or hate it forever.

Obviously, until the birth of the new school, art had not understood its mission with this clarity and loftiness; it did not recognize itself as an auxiliary and complement of reason: it did not assume this educative role; far from it: it made a point of embellishing and glorifying immorality itself, setting itself up as a criterion for morals and beliefs, and assuming the prerogatives of the absolute. Thus, the aesthetic faculty, depraved by idolatry, had become for man the principle of sin, and for society a ferment of dissolution.

Now this spontaneous corruption of art, and, through art, of public and private morality, is no longer possible. Art, having become rational and reasoning, critical and just, marching hand in hand with positive philosophy, positive politics, positive metaphysics, no longer professing indifference, neither in matters of faith, nor in matters of government, nor in matters of morality, subordinating idealism to reason, can no longer be a fodder for tyranny,

prostitution, and pauperism. An art of observation, no longer merely of inspiration, it would lie to itself and deliberately destroy itself, which is impossible. The artist can sell himself; for a long time to come, painting and statuary, like the novel and the drama, will have their infamous characters: art is henceforth incorruptible.
11Courrier du Dimanche, September 13, 1863, article by Mr. Castagnary.

CHAPTER XV

Confirmation of the Criticist Theory – The Stonebreakers. The Young Ladies of the Seine

The beginnings of the critical school, at the exhibitions of 1851 and 1853, produced a generally unpleasant, painful impression. This was bound to happen: first, we are at the prelude to a revolution; just as history is to be written, all art is to be remade: one had to expect that the first attempts would leave something to be desired; then, public taste is depraved and impatience for the truth is extreme. Do you feel corrupted? Mr. Guizot once asked the voters of Lisieux. He was sure of the answer; therefore, he did not lack the support of these honest citizens. With Courbet, it is different: he does not spare the truth from his audience; therefore, applause is rare and success mediocre.

The greatest evil of a society that has been brought down by the overexcitements of idealism is that it no longer has a taste except for that which has lost it, and that it no longer offers any appeal to the reformer, artist, or philosopher who seeks to bring it back. It resembles those sick people overcome by disgust, whom neither exercise, nor diet, nor the fresh air, nor the refinements of gastronomy have the power to whet their appetite. The ideal is one of the powers of our soul: once exhausted, it can only be restored by a vigorous effort of conscience. If the abuse of pleasures has weakened even the moral spring, man is finished: neither art nor reason can do anything more; there is nothing left to do but throw away the corpse. These reflections were primarily prompted by two paintings by Courbet, very different in subject matter, but complementary in concept: The Stone Breakers and The Young Ladies of the Seine. Courbet is accused of killing the ideal with his realism; on the contrary, no painter has ever aroused it more strongly than he did in these two remarkable works.

The Stone Breakers Others, before Courbet, attempted socialist painting, and failed. It's not enough to want to: you have to be an artist. Reproducing realities, once again, is nothing: you have to make people think; you have to touch, make an ideal shine on the consciousness, all the more energetic because it hides from view.

The Stone Breakers are an irony aimed at our industrial civilization, which every day invents marvelous machines for plowing, sowing, mowing, harvesting, threshing grain, grinding, kneading, spinning, weaving, sewing, printing, making nails, paper, pins, cards; finally, perform all kinds of work, often very complicated and delicate, and which is incapable of freeing man from the crudest, most painful, most repugnant tasks, the eternal prerogative of misery. Our machines in general, masterpieces of precision, have more skill than we do; they do better than we do, as long as what we ask of them requires intelligence and even art; once in motion, they replace us with immense advantage. There is only one criticism to be made of them: they do not move by themselves; they need to be watched, governed, and even served. Now, who is the servant of machines? Man. Man as serf, such is the last word of modern industrialism. The problem of capitalist speculation, consisting of transferring the workers' saved wages to the capital account each year, would have been solved long ago if mechanics had been able, for its part, to solve that of perpetual motion; if, ultimately, the original motor of industry could be other than man... Now that, you might say, is a lot of philosophy about a painting! What's to stop us from inventing a machine for breaking stones, just as one has been invented for sawing them? Mr. Courbet would then have had nothing to say. To which I reply: Courbet would have simply modified his subject, for the idea would have remained exactly the same, the problem being insoluble. One invention calls for another; so that, to avoid all labor, we fall into universal machinery, as impossible, as unattainable as perpetual motion. No doubt we would make a machine for breaking stones; But, to be consistent from the point of view of capitalism, another would be needed to extract them from the quarry, another to load them, another to transport and drive them, another to spread them; which would have no end. That's not all: admitting

this machinery, what will you do with the unfortunate people who

today live from these arduous tasks, and who then, without occupation, would have neither capital, nor property, nor income to subsist on?... So much so that as a result, man is the slave of the machine, of the machine he invented and built with his own hands; that the more we develop mechanics around us, the more we multiply servitude, and that the physical, intellectual, and moral misery of our slaves is all the greater the cruder their work and the more servile their function. Such is the law of labor: it is inevitable; there is no way to make it otherwise. What do you think of this situation? - It could not be more distressing. Would there not be a way to find some remedy, some alleviation? – We only know one: to distribute this heavy task like a public service, a corvée or a service, among all able-bodied members of society. Otherwise, there is exploitation, the enslavement of some by others, and therefore racial degradation, disfigurement. – How! Would aesthetics also conclude that? – Undoubtedly, and if art didn't think to say its word about it sooner, it's because until the year 1789 of Jesus Christ, the rights of man and of the citizen remained a closed letter. Egyptian idealism admitted servitude; Greek idealism, all the same... Close your eyes now. The characters in Courbet's painting are two in number: a young man of eighteen and an old man of sixty. Before examining the painting, tell me which of these two men you think best expresses servitude and misery. – The old man, certainly; old age adds to unhappiness and poverty, while there is no affliction that youth does not redeem. – Well, you were mistaken; look now.

This old man on his knees, bent over his hard task, breaking stones by the roadside with a long-handled hammer, certainly attracts your compassion. His motionless face is filled with a melancholy that goes to the heart. His stiff arms rise and fall with the regularity of a lever. This is indeed the mechanical or mechanized man, in the desolation inflicted on him by our splendid civilization and our incomparable industry. Yet this man has had better days, since he lived; If the present is for him without illusion, without hope, he at least has his memories, his regrets to keep him going, and it is no small thing to have something to remember; while this deplorable boy who carries the stones will know nothing of the joys of life; chained before his time to the drudgery, he is already unraveling; his shoulder is dislocated, his gait is slumped, his trousers are falling; careless poverty has made him lose care of his

person and the agility of his eighteen years. Crushed in his puberty, he will not live. Thus modern serfdom devours generations in their growth: this is the proletariat. And we speak of freedom, of human dignity! We declaim against the slavery of Blacks, that their status as beasts of burden at least guarantees against this excess of poverty? Would to God that our proletarians were materially treated as well as the Blacks! No doubt it would not be entirely fair to judge, according to this sad sample, the great people with ten million sovereign electors; but is it any less true that this is one of the shameful aspects of our society, and that there is not one of us, city dweller or peasant, worker or property owner, who could not one day, by an accident of fortune, find himself reduced to it? The condition of stone breakers is that of more than six million souls in France; so boast of your industry, your philanthropy, and your politics!

A critic, from a school that is not ours, said of The Stone Breakers that this painting was "a masterpiece of its kind." I accept this judgment. The genre to which The Stone Breakers belongs is today the highest, the only admissible one. What does this painting lack to attract everyone's approval? Precisely that it is, in its kind, less accomplished. If Courbet, for example, were as enamored of antithesis as Victor Hugo, nothing would have been easier for him than to create a contrast in his painting: he would have placed the stone breakers next to the gate of a castle; Behind this gate, in perspective, a vast and superb garden: in the background, the master's residence, with a terrace, portico, and marble statues representing Venus, Hercules, Apollo, and Diana. This would have had its effect, Courbet preferred the bare main road, with its desert and monotony: in which I completely agree with him. The solitary road has a far different poetry than this affected contrast of opulence and poverty. It is there that dwells work without distraction, poverty without celebrations, and desolate sadness. Peasants, who had the opportunity to see Courbet's painting, would have wanted to have it to place, guess where? On the high altar of their church. The Stonebreakers are worth a parable from the Gospel; they are morality in action. I recommend this peasant idea to Mr. Flandrin: it could enlighten him in his religious compositions.

The Young Ladies of the Seine Poverty saddens you; this labor of a blind horse tied to the riding school

It pains you to see. You admit tragedy, striking misfortunes, heroic unhappiness; but you ask if it is within the dignity of art to reproduce these vulgar sufferings. We know well, you say, that not everything in this life is roses and love: our hospitals, our prisons, our asylums, our pawnshops, our penal colonies, are gigantic monuments to our sorrows. Pain, it is a given, holds more space in this world than joy. But why confuse them? Why poison the little happiness that remains to us by mixing the images of one with those of the other. Art's mission is to cast a veil of consolation and decency over the miserable face of the century. Rome, which built the Colosseum, had its sewers and its cesspools, where certainly neither the senate nor the people ever assembled. Ah! Spare us your reality: it is odious enough in itself, without you adding to it with the refinements of your critical art... And this is precisely what your error consists of, the error of all schools of art since the beginning of the world: you want to separate what is in itself inseparable, light from darkness, spirit from matter, form from substance, beauty from ugliness, pleasure from pain, art from science and industry, the ideal from conscience, the enjoyment of work and illness, freedom from servitude, life from death, glory from humiliation. You do not know that human life is constantly composed of the union of these opposites, mixed in varying doses. You have made for yourself a type of the gods and a type of man, a type of the aristocrat and a type of the slave; You dreamed of an existence of perfection and bliss, and another of damnation and torture; and you said: This is the Ideal, Paradise, Art; and that is Reality, Barbarism, Hell. And thus you proscribed nine-tenths of the human race, reserving the ideal for yourself and condemning them to work. We reject your selfish categories; we claim that art must embrace everything, on pain of infamy for it and for you.

But you must be content. Here is luxury, elegance, leisure, lofty and ambitious thoughts, ardent passions. Contemplate and judge.

The Young Ladies of the Seine: a meaningless title, perfectly imagined to kill a work. The Seine has no place here; it is simply not discovered. The author meant to say: Two fashionable young people, under the Second Empire. But this title would have seemed seditious; it could not be allowed. Note, however, that the Empire here only serves to designate a date; just as the Seine indicates, by synecdoche, Parisian civilization. This is all that is political in

Courbet's painting.

Under the First Empire, what did young girls dream about? I suppose that in 1812 this idea would have come to a painter, as it has come to Courbet in our time. He would have painted her two figures weeping, like the Trojan women in the Aeneid by the sea; reading the bulletin of the Moskowa or that of the Berezina; pale and emaciated, as befits young ladies combing Saint Catherine's hair, and carrying in their hearts the mourning of their lovers. Thank heavens, we are not there yet. Napoleon III waged great wars; he fought great battles; he won great victories: one cannot say that he created a shortage of men; and if there are fewer marriages today, if the population seems to be declining, this is due to other causes. Our ideas, as well as our morals, have taken another direction. This is what the two figures posing there before us, unaware of it, and whom the libretto has called the Young Ladies of the Seine, will teach us. Young ladies, yes; for they are neither married nor widowed, that's obvious at first glance; they are not even engaged, perhaps through their own fault, and that is why you see them deep in thought.

The first is a beautiful brunette, with pronounced, slightly masculine features, those features that give a woman of eighteen to twenty-two satanic seductions. She is lying on the grass, pressing the earth with her burning breast; her eyes, half-open, swim in an erotic reverie. It is Phaedra dreaming of Hippolytus: Gods! Would that I were sitting in the shade of the forests!

It is Lelia who accuses men of the misfortunes of her heart, who reproaches them for not knowing how to love, and yet who rejects the timid and devoted Stenio. At first, the feeling she inspires in you is one of pity mixed with fear. One has an instinctive fear of these creatures whose passions are sometimes concentrated, sometimes leaping, never satisfied. There is something of the vampire in them. Then, as you contemplate this charming, strangely magnetic face, your pity turns to sympathy; you feel fascinated by it, seized by the demon that obsesses it. You would like, at the cost of all your blood, to extinguish the fire that consumes it. Flee, if you value your freedom, your dignity as a man; if you do not want this Circe to turn you into a beast. The other is blond, seated, like a marble bust. She speaks, however; She talks aloud to herself; her companion doesn't listen. She too pursues her illusion, a illusion not

of love, but of coldness.

Ambition. Why shouldn't she one day be a princess, like so many others, at least the wife of an arch-millionaire? Doesn't she have youth, beauty, wit, and talent? Would she be out of place in a high position? She is worth her equal. Besides, no one will be able to say that he married her without a dowry; she has already collected; she still expects something; she has increased her fortune, more than enough for a single woman. She owns stocks and bonds; she knows business and follows the stock market closely. She doesn't gamble: she's a fool! She operates on good securities bought at the right time, and which she knows, with no less propriety, how to dispose of. Oh! she won't be caught off guard; she has no illusions; mad love doesn't torment her. She will know how to wait: doesn't everything come to those who wait? Quite different from her friend, she is mistress of her heart and knows how to command her desires.

She will long retain her freshness: at thirty, she will look no more than twenty. By then, can she fail to meet a lord, a Russian prince, a Spanish grandee, or a stockbroker? Moreover, at whatever age she marries, she will have no children: this is the first condition a prudent girl sets in her marriage contract.

The Young Ladies of the Seine is a counterpart and contrast to The Stonebreakers; one of the two paintings explains the other, completes and justifies it. Both are in reality, and both are powerful through the ideal; to be convinced of this, it is enough to pause for a few minutes to consider them in turn. According to the principles we have developed, both subjects are equally within the domain of art. Ask yourself, however, after realizing your dual impression, which of these lives, that of these unfortunate day laborers or that of these elegant women, seems to you the most anti-aesthetic, the most demonic, if not from the point of view of material misery, then at least from that of moral misery and its frightful excesses. These two women live in well-being, surrounded by all the refinements that the luxurious arts can add to existence. They cultivate what is called the ideal; they are young, beautiful, delightful; they know how to write, paint, sing, declaim; they are true artists. But pride, adultery, divorce, and suicide, replacing love, hover around them and accompany them; they carry them in their dowry; that is why, in the end, they appear horrible. The Stonebreakers, on the other hand, cry out for vengeance against art

and society through their rags; deep down, they are harmless, and their souls are healthy. I don't know what criticisms have been made of the Young Ladies of the Seine.

The second figure seems to me too effaced. I like, I confess, for everything to be rendered and brought to prominence in an expressive painting; the more elevated and profound the meaning seems to me, the less I tolerate negligence. I hate sketches. These reservations made, I ask if such conceptions are not in the true nature of art: if it is not the highest idealism, that idealism which, instead of setting itself up as a religion, doubles its power by placing itself at the service of philosophy and morality.

CHAPTER XVI

On Prostitution in Art – Severity of the Critical School. Venus and Psyche

The artist, like nature, has the ability to infinitely vary the forms he produces. Instead of seeking the perfection of the human figure, he can use all figures; he must do so, as long as they help him achieve the higher goal of art: the education of mankind. In other words, his principle must be: Substitution of the idealism of the idea for the idealism of form.

At a glance, one grasps the importance of this transformation, which Rembrandt foresaw when he said: When I stop thinking, I stop painting. The absence of ideas, the weakness of the moral principle in the artist, causes him to completely lose the understanding of his subjects. Concerned only with form, provided his figures are beautiful, he worries little that his work runs counter to the truth or morality of the theme from which he draws inspiration. I have seen, for example, many Seductions of Joseph, many Susanna at her Bath; yet I have not encountered a single one of these paintings that corresponds to the subject. Even if Madame Potiphar is pretty, one says to oneself, in spite of oneself, that Joseph is a fool; and the moral lesson drawn from Holy Scripture becomes a provocation to adultery, by the very irritation it causes. Where does this perpetual failure come from? From the fact that artists have only ever known one thing: to arouse lust with the eyes, without knowing the first word about what it would take to command, by the same means, restraint. When one is a mediocre artist, one does not risk such difficulties. The painter said to himself, on the contrary: The more beautiful my wife is, the more Joseph's virtue will emerge. But this virtue needs support, motives, protection from above, that is, conscience, and you don't show us this. A lascivious image must be opposed by another that will influence the young man.

When the ancients painted Hercules between Virtue and Voluptuousness, they

understood the difficulty: if Virtue were absent or manifested by a logogriph, by a beautiful maxim, Hercules would succumb. But what have they done? They personified Virtue itself, they showed it to the hero in its heroic beauty. From then on, everything is said: Hercules prefers Virtue: it's quite simple, she is more beautiful than Venus herself, and we would do the same as him. The artist would then be very unhappy, very clumsy, if his Virtue were found to be less beautiful than its rival.

The same principle must be followed for the story of Joseph. Here, there is no allegory: Potiphar's wife is a real person, and she is alone. What was to be opposed to her? The image of her husband depicted in the apartment, Joseph invoking the friendship with which he is honored, recoiling from a betrayal, begging with a dismayed face the poor woman to return to herself, showing her his protector, to whom he owes everything. – Instead, nothing: a beautiful woman almost naked, panting with love, her throat in the wind, appealing with her voice, her look, her hand, to a handsome young man who refuses, we don't know, we don't see, we don't guess why; probably because he had taken a vow of virginity! And to make the situation even more impossible, the artist does not fail to capture the moment when there is a struggle between the two characters, the woman trying to restrain by force the inflexible man, who is not afraid to use violence to free himself. All this is absurd.

In Susannah at her Bath, the impossibility is of another kind. I am not considering whether we should rely on the biblical story, which says that Susanna, a woman of the highest rank, a model of marital fidelity and modesty, undressed completely naked in the open air, alone in a garden, to bathe. For my part, I cannot imagine Susanna, any more than Lucretia or any respectable woman of our time, putting herself in such a state: they all veil themselves, hide from their own gaze. But Turkish and Arab women do so, even when they bathe in company. I will therefore pass. This is where my criticism begins. It is a sacred story and a fact cited as an example to young people, to all women. Susanna, in a word, is a heroine of chastity, a saint. If this is so, and the artist has understood his subject, Susannah completely naked must inspire respect and arouse

no more immodest thoughts than the Venus de Milo in her supernatural nudity. 12 Then we no longer understand why the two senators observing her, restrained by each other, struck in their consciences, dare to make their proposal: it's impossible, it's beyond the human heart, it's a contradiction. This rape of Susannah by two becomes incredible, and I don't believe it. – But we are far from that. In morals

In the oriental world, in these over-vaunted delights of the harem, the woman who shows herself being supposed to make the advances, one is tempted to applaud the two corrupters, whose only fault in this instance is perhaps to show themselves together, when one could have succeeded. It is the brutality of the two men that makes Suzanne's virtue here; I would believe it more if it were only a tête-à-tête. Why have artists never even suspected these difficulties? Why so many paintings depicting Suzanne bathing, a Suzanne who, instead of inspiring respect, provokes desire? It is because artists, less and less moralists or philosophers, no longer seek in their subjects anything but an opportunity to paint the nude, to show women in a more or less provocative pose.

The cult of form was a temptation to which humanity succumbed more than once; it has always tended to replace the higher purpose of art. It is like a general who, after commanding his fellow citizens in war against foreigners, demands the crown from them and, instead of consecrating their independence, makes them his subjects; the purpose of war, however, was not to produce royalty or reward the general, but to ensure liberty. The adoration of form reached its highest degree of intensity among the Greeks, who identified it with their religion. It was against this idolatry that Saint Paul reacted by opposing his spiritualism. Christianity elevates religion far above art. As for the synthesis attempted by the artists of the Renaissance, it could not be sustained for long; With the Christian idea declining day by day, among Protestants as well as Catholics, the cult of form has regained its absolutism and still reigns today.

The critical school, by subordinating form to the IDEA, cannot fall into the errors we accuse artists who lack principles of. Without denying in any way the merit of beauty, which it can take pleasure in seeking and painting, the critical school makes it more variable, more meaningful, and it frees art from the narrow and childish goal

of creating figures without ideas, bodies without souls. Having reached this height, art can descend no further: willy-nilly, in the future, it must think. The idealism of form, far more tenacious than polytheism, is definitively vanquished; it could only be vanquished by ideas. Beauty will be neither debased nor disdained. Only, it must be recognized, it no longer reigns alone; it shares with the idea, and its prerogative is not even the greatest. The idea can subsist on its own and without beauty; it will never wear. Beauty alone is nothing. This is how in our society, idealistic no doubt, but much more rational, positive, critical, and practical

It seems that a virtuous, intelligent, active, clean woman, but without beauty, finds twenty husbands for one, while a beautiful person, if she has only her appearance, finds nothing. – Let us no longer separate the two sisters, I desire; let us strive to make the idea beautiful and the beauty intelligent: in this way we will be safe from all disappointment and all regret. But the most important result of criticism, or of the substitution of idealism of the idea for idealism of form, is the liberation of art from all the shackles of prostitution. A vast subject that would require a book, and which I will limit myself to treating briefly.

There is an intimate relationship between the ideal and voluptuousness; one could even say that the latter is the daughter of the former: it is pleasure tasted as an artist, idealized. The ideal excites one to possession. He who dreams of beauty wants to have it; as soon as he enjoys it, his idealism becomes voluptuousness. Art, insofar as its object is to awaken the ideal, especially that of form, is therefore an excitation to pleasure. If the passion it excites is love, it is a pornocratic agent, the most dangerous of all. Thus we see that except in the Middle Ages, where art, reacting against idolatry, became the interpreter of Christian spirituality, it has been an agent of corruption everywhere. It is so today as ever. – The multiplied cult of Astarte, Aphrodite, or Venus; the orgiastic, Dionysian, or bacchanalian festivals; The lamentations over the death of Adonis, the floral games, sacred prostitution, universal priapism, erotic poetry, vulgar, omnigamous love, are its monuments. Let us also add theaters, dances, wine, and good food. – Thus, everything is connected: the refinement of the arts brings corruption.

The truth of this relationship is so true that the same effect occurs

among the refined in devotion and among the refined in art. – From the origin of Christianity, idolatrous idealism, abolished as far as dogma is concerned among the neophytes or converted pagans, immediately took on a new, even more licentious form in mysticism. 13 The innumerable sects of the Gnostics, the Carpocratians, the Adamites, and a host of others, did little more than continue, under the banner of Christ, the mysteries of love. They have remained a horror in history. The flagellants, the quietists, and the Molinists are well known. All this is indeed the result of idealism. Modern art always does nothing but this; it is all the more corrupting because it lacks the excuse of religion, tradition, public indifference, and because it is in formal opposition to the modesty of mores and the moral trends of the time.

What reason is there to give us Ariadnes, Hebes, Heroes, Sapphos,

Nymphs? Why even Susannas, Eves, Potiphars?

At the 1863 exhibition, which I only walked through once, there was in the main hall, in the place of honor, a nude female figure, reclining and seen from behind, which I assumed to be a Venus Callipyge. While displaying her shoulders, her supple waist, her rich rump, this Venus, by an effort of good will, turned her head towards the spectator: blue and mischievous eyes like those of Cupid, a provocative face, a voluptuous smile; she seemed to say, like the trotters on the boulevard: Do you want to come and see me? This Callipyge is realism, after all, – I don't examine whether she is well made; – and Courbet could not deny it if art had no other principle than to reproduce what it pleases, without consideration of the social end. But how is it that the police, who reject Courbet's paintings, have accepted this immorality?

Any voluptuous painting, it is said, any representation of vice can have, in the final analysis, its moral utility. Why not accept this Callipyge on the same level as the Young Ladies of the Seine?… – Why? Because, in this last painting, the moral intention is not in doubt; because alongside the idealized vice, the painter has placed the corrective in that desperate languor that gnaws at the unfortunate woman and gives a glimpse of her misfortunes. Whereas here there is no preservative: it is the vulgar Venus in her triumph. – How can such a painting be rendered moral? There would have been only one way: to put a canker in his anus. Syphilis

and debauchery are sisters among us; come, young people, and see! That's what there was to say. But here, the disgusting and the horrible would have made the stomach ache and cry anathema. It was impossible. If the jury did its duty when such things are sent to it, it would send them back in pieces. What is a jury that doesn't even have a sense of modesty, that must be taught that art is nothing outside of morality? Isn't the Academy of Fine Arts, like that of Letters, a sister of the Academy of Moral Sciences?... - But what am I thinking?... The Academy of Moral Sciences teaches the doctrine of Malthus, which the Academy of Fine Arts displays in effigy. Malthus is the courtesans of Pradier and Clésinger.

If the public understood the insult being inflicted on it, it would set fire to the exhibition. The artists would call him a Vandal; he would send them to Cayenne. But the offended public has lost all initiative. As for the youth, who pride themselves on having one, they are truly complicit. They, who give Mr. About a fuss, do nothing against the fornicators, nothing against these lascivious acts which

dishonor not only our artists, but our society and our country; nothing against this trade in licentious paintings, obscene engravings and photographs that make Paris the great prostitute of nations, the poisoner of the universe.

All exhibitions abound with sculptures and paintings of this kind, which, I am assured, sell very well. Demand determines production, say economists. But what do artists' customers seek most? Licentious subjects.

A rich and gallant woman asked an artist to decorate a boudoir in which she would see her nude image reproduced in as many situations as he could imagine. A lot of money to be made; but what a failure, what an insult to the artist's talent!

A painter told me that one day a high-ranking figure who protected him said to him, after paying him the tribute of praise that one of his figures deserved: "All this is very pretty, but not cheerful enough; do you hear me?" "Very well!" "Intelligent artists are dismayed by this shame, and don't know what to do about it." "A sculptor, whom I asked, on my return from Belgium, what he was doing, replied in a somber voice: "I'm making c—!" "He was unjustly

associating himself with the mob of prostitutes, ministers of public lust. I have never heard anything more terrible." "You have to be Cambronne or a talented artist at the end of your tether to find expressions that the truth cannot conceal, but that the most consummate talent dares not repeat." ... One day, in the painting of Venus and Psyche, rejected in 1864, Courbet undertook to do through painting what the moralists Ezekiel and Juvenal did through poetry: satire the abominations of his time. But the means of the painter are not those of the writer. He would not dare to paint the phalluses of the Assyrians and Egyptians; he would not dare to show Ooliba in the posture described by the prophet: Denudavit quoque fornicationes suas, et discooperuit ignominiam suam; he could not show us Messalina at her twenty-fifth coupling; nor that other one bellowing like a doe in heat at the sight of an artist; nor that one pissing, in the moonlight, against the statue of Modesty; nor that one of whom it is said: Ipsa medullinae frictum crissantis adorat. These things are impossible in painting. The painter was therefore forced to wear a disguise. Not the slightest indecent gesture, not the slightest lewd attitude,

not even complete nudity. A sleeping blonde, whom a young girl would naturally mistake for a Psyche awaiting Love; a brunette arriving in the night, stealthily, and looking at her with an eye that could express jealousy or something else. The inhabitants of Ornans must have seen two women who, during the heatwave, took off their shirts to be more comfortable and not suffocate. Other people took them for bathers.

You have to be aware of things to understand the artist. You have to have read George Sand (Lélia), Théophile Gautier (Mademoiselle de Maupin): you have to be aware of the hypocrisy of immodesty of our time; you have to remember that Courbet was criticized for not knowing how to paint the nude, and that his critics reproach him for valuing the nude only as an image of voluptuousness. You should know that Pradier has been called the sculptor of the Breda district; that artists of the first merit, who seek noble, heroic beauty, are asked for pretty things, delightful figures; that dying Lucretias are tiring. You should have seen the exhibitions of recent years; you should know that M. de Nieuwerkerke had the Emperor buy a Leda holding a swan between her thighs... It is to all these people that Courbet says with his painting: You are a bunch of ruffians and

hypocrites; I know you, I know what you want and what your pimps ask of you. It is not painting the nude that you are concerned with; it is not beautiful nature that you hunger for; it is filth. Look, this is how one paints the nude, and I defy you to do the same. And this is what you are all looking for, you race of pederasts and tribades.

Freed from the absolutist cult of form, directed by ideas, transformed by criticism, purified by morality, art today returns to its natural mission. It is in France, in the land of law, that it should find its balance... But we will still let slip this glory that is offered to us. Art, once adored, is destined today, if it continues on its legitimate path, to experience persecution. It has already begun. Truthful artists will be hated as enemies of form, and perhaps punished as outraging public morality, inciting hatred among citizens against one another.

My compatriot, the sculptor Huguenin, sensed the truth of this observation. His Suzanne, leaping

indignantly out of the bath as soon as she thinks she's seen, is not the soft woman who abandons herself to Providence. Her slightly square form is of a very firm, very beautiful, and very rare type, a type that gives everyone the idea of a strong and virtuous woman. One senses that she will not remain silent in the face of slander, that she will know how to accuse and make her accusers tremble. She seems to be saying: Cowards! – One wants to avert one's eyes when seeing her, so imposing is her dignity. A beauty conceived in this way commands immediate respect: one senses that the will, the prudence, the conscience, the energy, everything is there. This is not the type of most Suzannes.

We all know two loves. One, ideal, ethereal, divine, Platonic, Uranian, celestial; we have all experienced it: that which is most heroic, most divine, most ideal. It is this that reason and justice seek in preference, the first to whom altars are due. The betrothal is delightful, divine. The marriage of the nun with the celestial spouse is a spiritual nuptials after which the soul would have to be raptured to earth. However, there is another love without which the first would be sterile; earthly love, fiery, passionate, reproductive of life, preserver of divine love itself; through which conjugal love is formed, and from which maternal love is born. – In marriage,

indeed, both loves exist. We must admit, we aspire to both as to the supreme good. Voluptuousness charms us, carries us away with force; it has its legitimacy, its right; it is the demon, no doubt, while the other love is the angel: both in struggle, in antagonism; but woe to him who excites the human heart to the cult of one or the other: he spoils them both. We must remain silent, speak of it only in passing, and be prudent and sober both in ideals and in passion.

14 If I had been the painter, I would have replied: Do your housework yourself, madame; do it every day; have children; and you will see your image more beautiful than I could paint it for you.

CHAPTER XVII

The Priests, or the Return of the Conference

The police... We hardly expected to find them involved in this matter, the police, therefore, since, through our sins and our stupidity, they get involved everywhere, saw in the painting we are about to report, a high degree of impiety: on the one hand, an outrage against religious morality, on the other, an incitement to contempt for a class of citizens, public officials, in the exercise of their duties. Consequently, it was decided, by superior order, that the said painting would be excluded from the exhibition. Now, when the police, when the authorities among us say something, there is no shortage of supposedly serious figures, professionally intelligent people, officials or assistants of the censorship, followers of the holy office, who applaud with both hands. I have no business criticizing here the action taken against Courbet's painting by the authorities. When authorities do something, respect commands us to assume that they had sufficient reasons for doing so. Apart from the question of art, there is politics... But a writer in the periodical press is attributed this judgment, far more severe than the silent execution of the police: "M. Courbet's painting is a bad action." There's the dirty word out, the police, justified in every way: an artist's conception, perhaps the most extraordinary ever mentioned in the annals of art, dishonored. It's fortunate for Courbet that he was banned from advertising: otherwise, you would have seen them all, these entrepreneurs of criticism, the dried fruits of literature and art, makers and destroyers of reputations, coming one after the other, like Panurge's dogs, unleashing

their urine on a work whose idea they are not even capable of grasping. What! It would be to satisfy a vain thought of slander, to excite the hilarity of a coarse public, unworthy of being called

Voltairean, that a man, to whom, after all, no one denies common sense or talent, would have built this vast machine, when all he needed was a square foot of canvas; it would be to strike down a peccadillo of three or four unfortunate village priests that he would have launched this thunderclap! Country clergymen gathered to confer among themselves on matters of their ministry; the conference over, they sat down to eat; the conversation becoming animated, the older ones took a swipe. Once on the way back, the fresh air stunned them; one can guess the rest. Truly, if this is all the artist wanted to teach us, he has taken too much trouble, and has wasted his genius and his vigils quite uselessly.

But, let us hasten to add, this is something quite different. What Courbet wanted to depict is not a more or less laughable scene of drunkenness; it is not even the contrast, maliciously noted, between priestly gravity and a violation of the laws of temperance: all this is the most insipid commonplace, unworthy, I repeat, of the honors of great painting. What Courbet wanted to show, in the manner of true artists, is the radical impotence of religious discipline—which amounts to saying of idealist thought—to sustain in the priest the severe virtue demanded of him; It is that the moral perfection sought by faith, by works of devotion, by the contemplation of a mystical ideal, is reduced to heavy falls, and that the priest who sins is a victim of his profession, much more than a hypocrite and apostate.

Who does not see here that the idea of such a composition could only fall into the mind of an artist the day when art, so long enslaved to its dogmatic idealism, had broken its chain, and, through the definitively acquired awareness of its principle and its destiny, had obtained the understanding of the religious ideal, in so many respects similar to the ideal of the ancient schools? The Return of the conference is essentially of our time: twenty-five years ago, as twenty-five centuries ago, it was impossible.

The priest, unfortunately for him, is, like the romantic and classical artist, a worshipper of the ideal and the absolute; He is not its implementer; he is not the master of his idea, nor of his impressions; he is its slave; this is what causes his moral misery, and sooner or later leads to a shameful fall. His dogma consists in denying the virtue of man and the efficacy of his conscience, just as the classical artist denies its beauty; to put all his

trust in divine grace, which alone can preserve him from temptation; similar in this to the artist who shuns the help of reflection and science, and relies only on inspiration. So much so that, while the artist arrives at impotence through his ideal, the priest, whose life must serve as a model for his brothers, ends in immorality through theology. It is in vain that he invokes, in his ardent prayer, the Spirit of life and sanctification: Veni, creator Spiritus; he will not be visited by him; he must expect no comfort. For the principle of our virtue is within ourselves, awaiting its development only in the service of its two powerful auxiliaries, work and study. Whoever ignores this truth seeks danger and will inevitably succumb. But the perfect life, according to the Church, is a life of contemplation and faith; The functions of the sacred ministry are not action, but worship; theology is not a science, it is a mystery. Certainly, priestly virtue, where it is found, is admirable; it borders on the miraculous: but, like art that gives itself over to the tyranny of the ideal, it rests on emptiness, and this is what Courbet so admirably observed. Between the priest, whose conscience is strengthened only in God, and the artist, whose genius feeds only on formal, spiritual ideals, on idols, the analogy is complete: they will both perish from the same dissolution.

The scene Courbet depicted is an example of this. Would members of the Institute, dining together after a discussion, become intoxicated? The fact is possible; it cannot be assumed. And if, by chance, this little misfortune happened to one of them, what would follow, either for the character's morality or for the scandal given to the public? Absolutely nothing: it would be like colic, indigestion, rheumatism, an accident that would not even be noticed. So convinced are we, in our hearts, that sin approaches only with great difficulty the man of action and ideas. Work, think, meditate, observe, love within the limits of legitimate affections, and the seductions of the flesh and the ideal will be powerless against you: Non appropinquabit ad te malum; you will resist the assaults of lust and pride, and conculcabis leonem et draconem. I'll go further: suppose that once, exceptionally, these same clergymen meet to discuss temporal matters, whether political, industrial, or scientific; on that day, rest assured, nothing bad will happen to them. What then makes them so weak? What leads them to these deviations from the regime, subjects of mockery for the peasants? It's that before sitting down to eat, they have, for one or two hours, discussed theology. So why is their intemperance mocked?

Precisely because, in the sincerity of their souls, they are concerned only with God and religion. Therein lies the moral superiority of secular science over sacred science, of action over contemplation.

Let us now examine Courbet's painting in detail.

Everyone knows that the rural clergy is bound by its regulations to hold monthly conferences whose purpose is to maintain esprit de corps among the clergy of the same canton and to train them in the discussion of theological questions. These pious gatherings, which take place sometimes at one person's home, sometimes at another, are naturally followed by a fraternal banquet, a kind of picnic, where outpourings of friendship follow the heat of controversy. In these gatherings, which certainly represent the best of priestly life in the countryside, spirits are enlivened, hearts expand, everything comes together to give the meal its greatest enthusiasm. It is the effect of this joy, semi-religious, semi-Epicurean, idealistic, and therefore sensual, that the artist of the painting wanted to portray vividly, by depicting a group of priests returning home from a cantonal conference.

The scene takes place in Franche-Comté, in the most beautiful valley of the Jura, the Loue Valley. In the foreground we see a group of four priests, one of whom, unable to drag his vast corpulence, has been hoisted onto a donkey, which is bending under the weight. He is the oldest; he has forty years of service; he has long since passed the age of fervor; His carefree brow, his full lips, his eye, at this moment somewhat lecherous, his Silenian bearing, reveal a cheerful guest who has reached, in this sleepy, idealistic and sensualist existence at once of the country priest, a high degree of materialization. One does not really know where the soul can be found in this thickness of flesh. An excellent man at heart, who does not count an enemy among his parishioners. He is supported on the left (the spectator's right) by a young vicar whom one would take for his son, if not rather his nephew; a handsome mountaineer, a sacristy gypsy, a mirror for the devout, seeking above all, in an ecclesiastical career, the positive joys of well-being, a sheltered life, and comfortable devotion. Perhaps this interesting Levite, with his prosperous but decent appearance, is not yet aware of all the vices that the truthful painter has played on his face. Don't be fooled, however: his chubby cheeks, his rolling eyes, his rounded figures reveal only too much, and the correctional police

occasionally make frightening revelations. On the right is a middle-aged priest, but lively and green, with blue glasses, a bilious complexion, the face of a weasel or a diplomat, a rustic Talleyrand, who holds the tottering Silenus by the arm. Prudent and experienced, he

understands the disadvantages of scandal, and would like to save at least appearances. So we see that he does not forgive his old colleague for his drunken state. “Drink as much as you like,” he seems to tell him; “but stay at home and go to bed!” Riding the donkey is a well-bred abbot, a guest at the castle and the good houses of the region, adored by the ladies, making music with the young ladies, with a gilded breviary, buckled shoes, and well-drawn stockings, confessor to countesses, a worldly ecclesiastic with a special destination, aspiring bishop. The gossip has not yet reached him; he lowers his head, as if he wants to hide from view, and strives, by dragging the rebellious donkey along, to shorten this journey, which is torture to his modesty. Behind this group walks a seminarian, with a candid face, full of youthful fervor, whose secret ambition, which until now he has confided only to God and his confessor, is to devote himself to distant missions, and who dreams of martyrdom. Somewhat disconcerted by what he sees, he supports with charitable solicitude an old clergyman stumbling and striking the ground with his cane; as if he had just denounced with a peremptory argument the heretics, the philosophers, the Jews, and all the enemies of the Church. Beside them, and to complete this second group, a priest of a distinct type steps forward: he is the Herculean priest, built at a right angle, with a terrible face, admired by the peasants for the roughness of his bearing, drinking, smoking, and swearing, exercising an irresistible influence over his parishioners through his energetic vulgarity. The duties of his modest parish, the administration of his factory, are not sufficient for his powerful activity. He has burst into the temporal; he has thrown himself into secular works; he plants, he cultivates, he exploits, he undertakes, he traffics, he speculates, he bids; he is a merchant of wood, grain, liquids, horses. Transport this vigorous and inflexible nature to the twelfth century: he will be, if circumstances favor him, a Pierre de Castelnau, a Saint Dominic, an Amaury. He will be the founder of the Inquisition, he will march at the head of the crusader army against the heretics, order the massacre of the insurgent populations, without distinction of age or

sex. In what a voice he would have thundered the anathema: Outside the Church there is no salvation! – Kill all: God will recognize his own!… It pleased Providence to have him born in the nineteenth century, after Voltaire and the Revolution, when philosophy and human rights had established their preponderance everywhere: he is only a poor country priest whose ardor is vented in horse-trading or insipid conferences, inter pocula. Oh! If only God knew how to take advantage of those who love Him!... What angers Him at this moment is the poverty of means.

of his colleagues: "Silly women!" he makes with a gesture of supreme disdain, "who don't know how to lift a glass of wine!" And his movement is so abrupt that his hat has fallen to the ground and the dean's dog barks at him in distress. At a respectful distance comes the group of maids, assistants to the banquet cook, who are carrying back on their heads, in baskets, a few good leftovers for the next day's lunch. The priest's maid is one of those indefinable beings encountered only in the world of the ideal: neither concubine nor wife, but more than a servant; ungainly, beatific, with an equivocal gait, a shifty eye, who has her share of influence in the spiritual governance of the flock, a sad associate of this sad shepherd of men. This entire troop passes in front of an old beech tree, in a hollow of which is placed under a grille a statuette of the Immaculate Virgin. The piety of the people, aroused by the clergy, has multiplied crosses and pious images throughout the countryside, along the roadsides, at every crossroads. Thus the priest, living in the shadow of the bell tower, near the faithful's graves, surrounded by holy images, consecrated vessels, blessed signs, objects of all kinds forming the furnishings of worship, itself consecrated by the hand of the bishop; the priest, whose every moment must be marked by an elevation of heart to God, who at every step is reminded of the holiness of his vocation by the monuments he himself has erected with his own hands, cannot take a step without exposing himself to mortally outraging his religion; If his vigilance slackens, his life will be nothing but a long sacrilege.

To the far left of the painting, and as if to express its moral, are a peasant and his wife, digging the earth at the edge of the road on which they see the procession coming towards them, distracted for a moment from their work by the spectacle they are witnessing. The peasant, coarse and illiterate, is nonetheless of his time. He has read

nothing, and he asks to read nothing: neither Voltaire, nor Rousseau, nor Dupuis, any more than Doctor Strauss or M. Renan. Philosophers, theologians, and artists equally pity him. Without having learned anything, he rarely frequents church. A positive and practical spirit, like Martin in Candide, he has lost his faith in heaven and the esteem of the clergy. He's not the one who risks getting lost in the reveries of pietism and the sublimities of the ideal; he goes straight to the fact and the thing; it's realism made flesh. He who works prays! I don't know who whispered in his ear that this word was from the New Testament; he took it for granted. At the sight of the holy men on a spree, before this dazzling contrast between the presumptuous spirituality of the minister of the altar and the Bacchic reality of his existence, he is seized with mad laughter; and this laughter, whose implacable rusticity

shocking, is nonetheless infectious; impossible, after a few minutes of examination, to escape it. The most serious, the most indulgent, the least satirical man, comparing the priest as his institution dictates him with what the fatality of a contradictory existence makes him, cannot help but think that God, in instituting the priesthood for the whitening of consciences, wanted to play the part. As for the peasant's wife, dominated by the teachings of her childhood, faithful to divine love, but painfully affected by what she witnesses, she prays God to forgive her fragile ministers, whom she promises to always listen to as the dispensers of his graces, invested by him himself with the power to bind and absolve. Note the contrasts that the artist, without seeking them, has spread throughout his work: the vulgarity of the scene contrasting with the beauty of the landscape; the comedy of the situation with the gravity of the profession; the superstition of the peasant woman with the indevotion of her husband; the donkey with its rider, etc. The peasant, stocky, bony, earth-toned, adds, through his trivial hilarity, to the scandal caused by the clergymen, with their well-fed bodies and plump, vermillion-tinged cheeks. The woman, square, stocky, depressed in body and soul, a sacrificed creature, is not made, far from it, to highlight the misconduct of the principal actors through the idealism of her person. Who will say what these priests' maids think, what they feel, these neutral beings, in whom the sacristy air has killed, along with true piety, all feminine feeling? They have neither heart nor soul: old maids who have learned vice without love, bigotry without religion. Perhaps the

most astonishing figure in the painting is that of the donkey, which one would be tempted to declare the most reasonable of all, zôon logicon, if its recalcitrant mood did not warn us that it is incurably stupid, and which seems placed there to symbolize the stupefaction of man through the transcendentalism of faith.

But what we must not forget, lest we lose the meaning of the painting and completely distort its effect as well as its intention, is that these priests are all sincere in their religion. They have the faith of Jesus Christ, make no mistake; apart from the dean and his nephew, who are noted as doubtful, the others are true and zealous believers. What distinguishes them among mortals is this alliance of such fragile virtue with the energy of a belief that seems designed to tame everything, passions and the flesh, the world and the devil. Such is nature's inevitable reaction against the ideal: by dint of exciting in them the love of heavenly things, they have fallen into sensualism. The spirit of the age, the spirit of softness and voluptuousness, has seized them; they love to live well and do nothing; they

sin with their penitents, their flocks, and they have learned not to be too ashamed of it. We are men like the others, they say with quiet humility; that is no reason to insult our faith and accuse us of hypocrisy. And the more they sin, the more they imagine they can be saved by the practice of their sacraments and the meditation of their mysteries, until the day when, the demon of quietism taking complete possession of them, they set aside both the exercises of piety and the prescriptions of morality. If there were not a reason superior to all religious faith, a morality higher than that of the cults authorized by the laws; If, as in the past, the Church were the mother and providence of the State, Courbet's painting would certainly be highly inappropriate: by bringing the peccadilloes of the priesthood into the open, it would shake the foundations of morality, and it would have been right to proscribe it. But since the Revolution, the relationship between religion and society has changed; the legislator has taken the pontificate under its protection; human rights have become judge and master of canon law; morality has been established as a dictate of conscience, no longer as an order from on high; so that the question of which offers the greatest guarantee, a virtue founded on right reason or a virtue established on the ideal, has inevitably arisen, and the

freedom to discuss it has become an article of our public law. What am I saying? The question is implicitly resolved against the Church by the country's constitution; and when Courbet composed his painting, he was merely making himself the interpreter of the law and universal thought. His work had the right of a bourgeoisie to the Exhibition, the right to the Academy and the Museum.

CHAPTER XVIII

COURBET: His Personality – My Reservations

I have reviewed Courbet's principal works and expressed my appreciation of them from the point of view of the IDEA. I have not dwelled on the flaws of his works: the lack of perspective and proportions; certain uniform black tones, as in the painting of The Priests; exaggerations such as the peasant's laugh, a bit forced; certain negligence that betrays dishevelment; a tendency to overreach, which is part of the man's genius; sometimes brutality; something shocking, coming, in my opinion, from the fact that he lacks a high awareness of his art and his principles. I therefore do not intend to become his apologist as regards matters of craft: I have no authority for that. I remain on my own ground, the thought of the work and the school; And that is why, before going any further, I want to clarify my idea of the man.

One day, when I was beginning to work on this book, I told Courbet that I claimed to know him better than he did; that I would analyze him, judge him and reveal him to the public and to him as a whole. This seemed to frighten him: he had no doubt that I would make one mistake after another; he wrote me long letters to enlighten me, letters that taught me very little, and made me feel that I was not an artist. To which I replied that I was as much an artist as he: not a painter, but a writer, since it had frequently happened to me in my works to temporarily abandon dialectics for eloquence; and, as art is the same everywhere, I believed myself perfectly competent in the matter. This seemed to calm him a little, and he thought only of making himself known to me as he believes himself to be, which is not quite the same thing as what he is.

Courbet, more artist than philosopher, did not think everything I find: it's quite simple. He certainly did not conceive of his subject of The Cures with the power

that I see there and that I indicate. I believe that he intuited his principle as a painter, by virtue of his innateness, not as a thinker, let alone as a philosopher. He hesitated and varied a lot in his expression. But, admitting that what I thought I saw in his figures was an illusion on my part, thought exists; and since art is only valuable through its effects, I do not hesitate to interpret it in my own way. If I exaggerate his importance as a thinker, there is no harm in that: at least it serves to make my readers understand what I want and what I seek.

Courbet is a true artist, of genius, morals, temperament, and, as such, he has his pretensions, his prejudices, his errors. First of all, he believes himself, like his colleagues, to be a universal man. – We must tone it down. Endowed with a vigorous and comprehensive intelligence, he has as much wit as a man of the world, yet he is only a painter; he knows neither to speak nor to write; classical studies have left few traces on him. Built like a Hercules, the pen weighs in his hand like an iron bar in a child's. Although he talks a lot about series, he thinks only in detached thoughts; he has isolated intuitions, more or less true, sometimes fortunate, often sophisticated. He seems incapable of constructing his thoughts; in this, too, he is purely an artist. 15

In his thoughtless generalizations, he believes that everything is changeable, morality like art; that justice, law, social principles are arbitrary like those of painting, and that he, free to paint what he wants, is equally free to follow customs, to free himself from institutions: in which he shows himself to be as little advanced as the lowest of artists. This simply proves that in him, as in his fellow men, idealism prevails over high social faculties, and that his virtue is weak.

He still makes himself an apologist for pride; in this, he shows himself to be quite an artist, but a second-rate artist; for, if he had superior sensitivity, he would feel aesthetically that modesty has its price; that if it is sometimes hypocrisy, it is not always so. Modesty is one of the most delicate things that man is given to appreciate; he in whom sophism has stifled this feeling is no longer a man: he is a brute.

I allowed myself this little digression, unrelated to art, because I noticed a certain cunning in Courbet, common to many others: he

strives to bring everything into line with his ideas or to extend his ideas to things he misunderstands and which cannot be denied; on the other hand, he willingly sets up as a maxim the negation of things that are beyond him.

Let's return to our subject, art, principles.

Courbet can be defined as: A great intelligence whose all faculties are concentrated in a single one. If he could have categorized himself, he would be more of a logician than an artist. It's hardly surprising that, at this point in time, he's still searching for himself and only half-knows himself. I therefore have many reservations about his maxims regarding art.

For example, Courbet does not want artists to work on commission. This precept, which shows how much he values spontaneity and independence, cannot be accepted absolutely. The artist, by virtue of his aesthetic faculty, must know how to understand and sense what pleases others, and reproduce it by correcting and embellishing it: without this, he lacks the full range of sensitivity that art requires.

Without formally condemning the past of art, Courbet wants us to put it aside and stop worrying about it. The past, he says, can only serve as education; one should only draw inspiration from the present in one's works. I do not accept this conclusion, a convenient way to position oneself as the prince of art and the sole artist. Humanity must lose none of its ideas and creations; it accumulates its riches and uses everything. We must move forward, but while preserving everything. I will return to this idea; for the moment, I am content to set aside my reservations.

Courbet calls himself the most individual and independent of artists. Yes, independent in temperament, character, and will, like spoiled children who only do what they want. Yes, personal in the sense that he is too often preoccupied with himself and somewhat boastful of vanity: what is most reprehensible in his paintings is precisely what reveals his personality. He created a purely personal painting in his Real Allegory, which is no better than his Daughters of Lot. The artist's originality is shown in the choice of subjects, the way he conceives and executes them. This granted, Courbet does as all true artists do: he identifies with his idea, explores it, thinks only

of it, and makes a representation of it that is all more successful the more impersonal it is and the more people it pleases. The painter, like the historian, the poet, the playwright, the novelist, the actor, must step back behind his characters.

While recognizing Courbet as an initiator, I cannot accept his claim to have revealed completely unknown horizons to art. First of all, genius never emerges in isolation: it has its precedents, its tradition, its accumulated ideas, its faculties magnified and made more energetic.

by the intense faith of generations; he does not think alone in a solitary individualism: it is a collective thought grown by time. Secondly, the French school is moving in the same direction as Courbet, without either he or she, perhaps, knowing it. It is through landscape and animal painting that it returns to nature and the things of democracy. It is enough to cite the most well-known names: Rousseau, Fromentin, Daubigny, Corot, Barye, Rosa Bonheur, Marilhat, Millet, Brion: all must end in criticism. Courbet invented neither realism nor idealism, any more than nature. What he did was done before him; it is done today by others, often his rivals, sometimes his conquerors. Everything that has been said about him and that he himself has spouted is devoid of common sense.

I heard Courbet call his paintings real allegories: an unintelligible expression, especially since it put him in contradiction with himself. What! He calls himself a realist, and he deals with allegories! This bad style, these false definitions have done him more harm than all his eccentricities; he is a realist, and he returns to the ideal through allegory!

The truth is that, as I have already said, Courbet, in his realism, is one of the most powerful idealizers we have, a painter of the most vivid imagination. I would only take as proof his Fighting Deer, for the execution of which these animals certainly did not pose before him. His little "Pêcheur de chavots" would be universally admired if it could be understood: it is a scene from the life of the children of Ornans fishing for small fish in the Loue with a fork, and it will work wonders on the fountain to be built in the middle of the town. Courbet's idealism is profound; only he is careful not to invent anything. He sees the soul through the body, whose forms are for

him a language, and each feature a sign. Courbet, in fact, grasping the relationships between the bodily figure and the affections and faculties of the soul, its habits and passions, said to himself: What man is in his thought, his soul, his conscience, his intelligence, his spirit, he shows on his face and in his whole being; to reveal it to himself, I need only paint it. The body is an expression; Consequently, the painting that represents and interprets him is a language. A philosopher would make a psychography; I would make a painting. Let's undress this man, and we'll see. This is Courbet's realism: the representation of the outside to show us the inside. But this representation is no longer a simple portrait, a photograph, any more than Praxiteles' Venus; it is composed of features collected and combined together based on the observation of the...

realities: in this, it is pure idealization. In The Bather, ideal feminine beauty is implied; this was not what the artist wanted to highlight; what he wanted to show was the bourgeois soul. To better bring out his idea, he composed an ideal figure, at least in this sense; and this ideal is dazzling, it astonishes, it dismays. This is how Courbet marries these two elements, the ideal and the real, imagination and observation. If I were a minister, an ambassador, or an emperor, I would be careful not to be painted by him.

In short, Courbet, a critical, analytical, synthetic, humanitarian painter, is an expression of the times. His work coincides with Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy, Vacherot's Positive Metaphysics, Human Rights, or Justice Immanent in Me; the right to work and the worker's rights, announcing the end of capitalism and the sovereignty of producers; the phrenology of Gall and Spurzheim; the physiognomy of Lavater. He owes immensely to the happiness he experienced living in Ornans; if he had been born, if he had grown up in an Academy, he would not be himself. It was freedom that taught him his way. 17 He acquired a lofty and fertile thought; he has not yet been able to master it, to express it, although he has served it brilliantly. This thought, as we see, filled him; it gave him, in the beginning, a mad vanity, which everyone spoke about, but which, as joyful as it was naive, made people doubt the man and his idea, and almost prevented them from being taken seriously. Then, contradiction and a fiery polemic came; They pushed Courbet to the very paths of eccentricity and paradox.

Overly exalted by people who didn't understand him, overly degraded by others who didn't understand him at all, he had the misfortune of not being, from the very first day, classified and brought back to his phalanx:18 that would have calmed him, and he would have created, with a just and less exaggerated sense of himself, a few more masterpieces while avoiding serious reproaches.

Now, Courbet must know this: he must move forward, he has no need to talk about himself more; we know what he wants, where he's going; we expect his works. His colleagues are as enlightened as he is. He will have successors, continuers, rivals, without them having to fear that their reputation will suffer, and that they will be less well-deserved. Ideas have no owners, and just as the inventor of oil painting cannot claim the prize for his talent over those who used it after him, so Courbet cannot claim superiority over those who followed him, solely because of the great and fortunate idea that first enlightened him.

15 The logician and the artist are in antithesis, two extremes; but, precisely for this reason, they

understand each other and even resemble each other. They are both like the idea and the ideal; the same common sense governs and saves them.

16 Courbet writes to me that the art of the ideal governs two-thirds of mortals: in which he is right. He demands

that the ideal be fought: in which he is also right. But he has no idea that by fighting the ideal, I am moving the majority of humanity from the ranks of the ideal into those of science and law, that I am becoming its master, and that he and all his colleagues are no longer anything but my subordinate collaborator.

17 One thing to note, and which testifies to the universal vice of schools, methods, traditions, whose general utility cannot be denied, but which too often also become routines, causes of prejudice, chains for the mind: it is there that errors are perpetuated, that immobility and the spirit of resistance are formed; solidarity between mediocre talents, cliques, intrigues, the highest expression of which is found in the Academies. (See especially the French Academy, that of Fine Arts, and that of Moral Sciences). It is

difficult to know which is more harmful to art: the support of power or its genes, schools and academies or freedom. I would not want a professorship, no Conservatoire (atrocious word); simply masters and apprentices who remain free. Professorship and school have led to the complete dissolution, the negation of all principles and rules, while pure freedom has led Courbet to discover his true laws. Now, the absence of principles is servitude – RULES ARE FREEDOM. The writer and the artist neither sow nor cultivate themselves: there is no callipedia by means of which one can acquire them at will. Consider the students of the École Normale: chosen from among the graduates of the colleges, raised in this hothouse, they have lost, by their very education, originality, personality, and the law. They are skeptics, writers too well-bred for there to be anything spontaneous, strong, sudden, or immediate in them: they are pedantic mediocrities.

18 This is what I have just tried to do. But Courbet, like all artists, wants to be infinite like the world, mysterious like the ideal, especially the only one of his kind and species among painters. I greatly fear that, while doing him full justice and giving him a splendid position, he will find himself only marginally satisfied. Have I not defined him, classified him, categorized him, put him in his place? How audacious! His reputation will gain, but his vanity will suffer. Try to satisfy these gentlemen. You can get along with a philosopher, a scholar, an industrial entrepreneur, a soldier, a lawyer, an economist; with anyone who calculates, reasons, combines, and speculates; but with an artist, it is impossible.

CHAPTER XIX

Schools: Conservation and Progress

Today, the so-called realist school exists. This school, which I call critical, that is, humane, philosophical, analytical, synthetic, democratic, progressive, is dominant; but it is not yet fully aware of itself. It does not know itself; it lacks theory; it has not been able to define itself, to lay down its principles and laws. Already, falsehood and abuse are creeping in; the most insignificant productions are being displayed: they call themselves realistic, and that's enough. Taking a group, a shack, some household utensils, in the street or across the fields, and making a painting of them, that may be realism, I don't say no, but it's nothing. And if this could have served as an exercise for the artist, it is, as a work of art, nothing: I prefer a photograph: it costs me fifty centimes and has no pretensions. One must not imagine that it is enough to paint or model the first person who comes along, worker, peasant, bourgeois, or other, to be an artist of the new school. Here lies the GREAT ERROR, the error of errors, which would promptly bring down art, and, through banality, through disgust, would drive us back to mythology. One must think and make others think; the painting must have a scope, a purpose; without that, I disdain it. As fantasy, as ideal or poetic expression, I don't want it: I prefer Raphael, David, Ingres.

There is not, and cannot be, a purely realistic art, and consequently no realistic genre or school; realism, being only the material basis on which art works, is in itself beneath and outside of art. Art is essentially idealistic; therefore, idealism, in its most general sense, cannot serve to distinguish a school, a genre, or an era. But idealism occurs in various forms: it is here that it becomes possible to distinguish various genres.

Our study of the evolution of art has given us its moments,

corresponding to as many genres, and which can be used to describe as many schools.

We therefore have, as the first level of art, the typical school, whose genre consists of reproducing human types, types of race, caste, or others, as the ancient Egyptians and Assyrians did. Disdained today —we now only make portraits of individuals—the typical school would have to create racial portraits: an immense and very useful task for ethnography. I have traveled little, and I have been able to observe that in France, the people of Franche-Comté, Lyon, Burgundy, and Auvergne are all completely different. What would it be like if, outside France, we studied the types of Europe and the entire world? The English, the German, the Jew, present many differences. The Muscovite and the Pole, both of whom I persist in considering Slavs, have no fewer. I say nothing of the Chinese. – Why then does it come about that artists make no distinction in their paintings of all these types? Art for them has only one form: which is absurd. – All races must be preserved, represented in their type, in their physique, in the expression of their temperaments and aptitudes. The only school that, since the Egyptians, has respected this rule is the Dutch-Flemish school; it has familiarized us so well with the type of its race that a Parisian who knows nothing of the Low Countries except the paintings in the Louvre, once he arrives in Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Amsterdam, believes himself to be in familiar territory. The second school, indicative of the second degree of art or idealism, is the allegorical, symbolic, mythographic, and hieroglyphic school. Born with religion, with symbols, it has accomplished its work; it has nothing to do. Its imitated monuments serve to adorn palaces, gardens, books, etc. The third school seeks pure beauty, beauty characterized by proportion and harmony. I call this school idolatrous because its idealism results in the worship of form for form's sake. It was through the work of statuary that the polytheistic religion was formed; it was the cult of visible beauty that led to the worship of the gods. Since Christianity, this cult and the school of art that represented it had disappeared. But the school was resurrected in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; and, the gods aside, it has seized attention and favor.

The fourth school is the Christian, spiritualist, or religious school. Here the artist seeks to convey, not the ideal of form, but that of religious sentiment: He gives expression to his figures, but an expression

mystical, supernatural. Outward beauty is neglected, erased, to allow inner beauty, that of the soul, to appear. Now, as long as there are religions or religious sentiments on earth, there will be spiritual painting, testifying to the feeling of veneration, adoration, elevation of the soul towards the Divinity, inner purity, mortification, submission. Idolatry and spirituality are correlative and complementary. Fifth school. – Let us count, if we wish, as a school the movement from the Renaissance to the present day, which, without mentioning idolatrous, mythological, and symbolic imitations, is distinguished by two things: 1° the union of beauty with spirituality (Virgins, Christs, etc.); 2° the arbitrary application of the rules of beauty and expression to human, historical, or hypothetical figures. As for the division of the classics and the romantics into two schools, I do not accept it; what distinguishes them is the greater or lesser importance given by the former to the beauty of form, by the latter to the expression of feeling. Both are fantasists who, uniting everything, mixing everything, create outside of observation, belief, and morality. It is always, at bottom, the same adoration of the ideal, the same pretension of painting to exist by itself and for itself, the same absurdity of art for art's sake.

The sixth and final school, the one that indicates the highest degree of idealism, is the critical school. Reasoning art, thinking art, reflective art: it has understood that there must be harmony between nature and thought; – art of observation: it studies, in the expression of features, thoughts and characters; – essentially moralizing and revolutionary art: it critiques morals by its own means. Having reached this degree of elevation, art is no longer venal or prostituted; it cannot become so: prostitution is its opposite.

Since all these schools and the genres they represent are so many diverse moments or epochs in the great evolution of art; since each comes to be resolved into the last, it follows that none can entirely vanish and disappear. Art, in developing, must retain everything; It is not forbidden for him to sometimes return to himself, to obey the inspiration of his childhood and youth, and to prove that, as he is progressive, he is universal and eternal. Our civilization, moreover, is so comprehensive, so vast, that it admits all works; it opens an outlet to everything that is good, beautiful, useful.

Thus, let us place in our gardens, our parks, our flowerbeds, our

At crossroads, on our monuments, mythological or allegorical statues of Youth, Abundance, Ceres, Bacchus, fauns, nymphs, Venuses, Apollos, it's our right; and why not? Why renounce these memories? Why proscribe our early years, blush at our youth? Are Pallas, Mnemosyne, and the Muses so ill-placed at the Academy? The statue of Nature, alma parens rerum Natura, at the Museum of Natural History? Melpomene, Erato, Terpsychore at the theater? Themis at the law courts? Sphinxes on our stoves and fireplaces? Griffins on our armchairs?... Why should I prohibit the illustration of La Fontaine's fables, Perrault's tales, and, even more so, the history of Herodotus, of Livy? A writer tried to restore the historical character of Jesus; doubtless he could only have produced a conjectural work: why should painting not attempt to restore, according to historians, the figures of great men? For the same reason, I defend neither Christs, nor Virgins, nor martyrs.

The wrong, the error, is to lump all these together in the same esteem; to grant the same artistic importance to such diverse ideas; to judge everything according to the same criticism, and to forget that what may be tolerable, even worthy of praise, as conventional art, a memory of an era that is no more, it is absurd to cite as a testimony to contemporary art and to contrast it with ancient works.

Thus, while for academics, so-called history painting, serving to represent events and characters from a distant era, is the first of all genres, for me it is only a secondary genre. It is not true, not positively true; it is entirely hypothetical, and can only serve indirectly, through fiction, the great goal of art: it is illustration, decoration, archaeology. This may have its charm, its educational utility, but it remains far below the true destiny of art. Far below this are the romantic illustrations of Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, and an entire fantastic Middle Ages: Velleda, Francesca de Rimini, Faust, Margaret, Mephistopheles: representations of fabulous characters, created in the image of the artists, in poses and attitudes that are more or less forced or interesting. A similar observation can be made about so-called historical novels, such as that of Notre-Dame de Paris, for example. What proves how wary we must be of these kinds of books is that, even when confined to current events, the novelist is prone to error and does not always accurately capture the characters; he distorts and distorts the truth before his

eyes and creates characters in his own image.

A novel whose story is set in the Middle Ages—even further back, in the time of the Romans and the Carthaginians—loses more and more of its plausibility and its seriousness, becoming a work of curiosity. Conjectural works must be presented as conjectures. The histories of Martin, Monteil, Michelet, can bring us the monuments of the customs of our fathers and sometimes attempt to represent them vividly; it is impossible to make a true novel of them, any more than to speak Latin or Greek like the contemporaries of Cicero or Demosthenes.

The translation of the first canto of the Iliad by M. Littré is a tour de force for which great talent and science were required, a prodigy of philology; I would not dare see it as a literary work.

Humanity, in gaining centuries, cannot forget itself. But its morals and tastes change; and our arts, insofar as they concern us directly, can no longer be what the arts of our fathers were. Therein lies the great reconciliation of eras and the true genius of artists. Therefore, the entire decorative aspect belongs to the students; the paintings of the present time belong to the masters. – No more confusion of ranks!

Art will always produce things of a more or less profound idealism, according to the need we have for them. Thus, we will have to recreate typical painting; we will never renounce allegory or beauty; we will create religion and fantasy; but everything, in the final analysis, must be explained, completed by critical painting; everything must pivot on this supreme genre, critical art. The ideal must be subordinated to truth and justice, because these constantly drive us to action, to research; while the ideal keeps us in inertia and softens us. The idealist is satisfied; he admires himself, he disdains, he is a stranger to everything. The avenger is more modest: nothing his brothers think or what happens to them finds him indifferent.

Idealism must always be brought back to science and conscience, to truth and law, which are its ends, subordinate to judgment, of which it is only the preparer and auxiliary. Is God, the ideal of justice, separated from justice? He becomes for us a principle of iniquity.

In the time of the Greeks and the Renaissance, beauty being taken for the resplendence of truth, according to Plato's words, one had the right to conclude that one could not stray from the path of the ideal: the ideal and the idea, like beauty, truth, and justice, being identical. But we have noticed and we continue to say that beauty, pursued alone and without regard for truth and law, without a sufficient awareness of justice and without a philosophy

parallel, is only an incomplete given, a corrupting mirage. The increasingly close identity of these three elements, beauty, science, and justice, is also the goal we are heading towards, by virtue of progress.

19We lack neither studies nor historical materials. Do we really have a history?

We have providentialist history (BOSSUET, ANCILLON, CANTO); so-called philosophical history (GIBBON, RAYNAL); classical history (VERTOT); chauvinistic history (Victories and Conquests, VAULABELLE); apologetic and garrulous history (THIERS: History of the Consulate and the Empire); doctrinaire history (THIERS: History of the Revolution); epic history (MICHELET); novel history (LAMARTINE); Jacobinic and declamatory history (Louis BLANC); Historyjournal (BUCHEZ); Finally, history textbooks, history lessons, history summaries: simple teacher's notebooks intended for young people preparing for the baccalaureate.

We have no history because we have not become ourselves.

CHAPTER XX

Divine Beauty and Human Beauty

The critical school, like those that preceded it, is in turn only a moment in the historical evolution of art; it is the preparation for a new phase, which we can already foresee, and which will aim to combine, in an ideal unknown today, moral beauty with physical beauty, to create what I will call HUMAN BEAUTY; for we still know only divine beauty, the highest expression of which was given to us by Greek art.

Ancient beauty is the image of balance; it is the beauty of the gods, the ideal, the perfect, and consequently the immutable. Based on the data of art and mythology, one wonders in what way Venus could be more beautiful than Pallas and Juno, and on what grounds Paris could base his judgment. Could the Greek, worshipper of both, admit that his divinity had no flaw in his person? Impossible: in all three, beauty must have been divine, immortal, perfect.

This is so true that the statues of the gods and goddesses are not distinguished from each other by any such superiority, unless there is a fault on the part of the artist. As virile forms, Jupiter, Neptune, Mars, Mercury, Apollo, and Bacchus are all equal. Hercules is a little below; but Hercules is only a demigod, and then he is an athlete. However strong and handsome the athlete, even if he, like Hercules, Perseus, Castor, and Pollux, is descended from a god, he is a little below the divine, whose power is manifested not by muscular energy, but by divine energy. It is the same with goddesses and nymphs: beauty is equal in all. One can scan the poets: one will hardly find a difference in stature between them, according to dignity.

Another proof of the truth of this observation is that gods and goddesses

are distinguished by their symbolically represented attributes: Jupiter holds the thunderbolt, Mercury his caduceus, Apollo the lyre, Neptune the trident; Bacchus is crowned with vine branches; Amphitrite is dragged on a shell; Juno has the crown, royalty, and the peacock; Pallas the aegis, the head of Medusa, and the owl; Venus her famous girdle. – Some, it is true, claim that the latter had blond hair and black eyes, while Pallas was brunette; this is a rumor.

Read the story carefully, therefore, and you will see that what determined Paris was the promise Venus made to him to grant him the pleasure of the most beautiful woman in Greece, of a beauty comparable to herself.

We must from time to time refer to this ideal, absolute, divine beauty. But there is a beauty less regular, less geometric, a beauty mobile, passionate, fiery like life, like strength in action, like health in eruption: it is the devil's beauty. Inferior to the other in correctness, precision, dignity, placidity, serenity, calm, the divine, but much more attractive, more heady, more captivating, in expression, passion, life, movement, it carries us away, carries us away, and we love it madly. The Greeks, in their fables, seem to have sensed its superiority. Note, in fact, that generally there is little love between the gods. Juno is married to Jupiter, Amphitrite to Neptune, Proserpina to Pluto, Rhea to Saturn: sad marriages. The Muses, the Graces, Pallas, Artemis remain virgins. The gods prefer mortal women to the inhabitants of Olympus. Consider Jupiter and Calisto, Io, Maia, Leda, Semele, Danaë, Alcmene, Europa; Neptune and Theophanes, Tyro, Iphimedia; Apollo and Daphne, Cassandra, Coronis, Clymene. The goddesses also prefer humans, shepherds or princes: Diana and Endymion, Cybele and Atys. Venus lavishes herself on everyone, gods and mortals: Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, Bacchus, Mercury, Adonis, Anchises, Butés. Does it not seem like a confession escaped the poets, that the beauty of the devil is more beautiful than divine beauty? The gods and goddesses abandoning each other to pursue mortal beauties: there is quite a revelation here; The divine beauty of Pallas and Juno leaving Paris cold, that of Venus ravishing him with a gaze even slightly lascivious, what a confession! Greek art is judged by these amorous adventures, so naively recounted in mythology.

Just as there was still something to be done: in religion after the revelation of Orpheus; in morality after the instruction of Socrates;

in politics after Plato and Aristotle; so, after Greek art, human art remained to be created. Now, after two thousand years, after all the transformations of art, we do not

We do not yet know what human beauty is. For, although we have gathered in our race fine examples of virtue and heroism, we have not yet seen a man who is at once virtuous, courageous, intelligent, learned, free, and happy. All these conditions, which are today, as in the past, the object of our research, are necessary to create virile beauty. The Egyptians did not know human beauty, since they did not move beyond symbols and types; since the figures of their gods, in human form, are themselves typical; since they did not dare, in representing themselves, show us their faces in the variety of expression and the truth of nature; since, finally, what we know of their institutions proves that they were neither happy nor free. The Greeks did not know it, since they sought the pure ideal, and their democracy was never anything but tyranny, jealousy, anarchy, and soon ruin. The most beautiful Greek soul was that of Socrates, the ugliest of all. Were the Greeks, so artistic, happy, free, and wise?

The statuary of the time of the Roman Empire applied itself to more human subjects and overcame greater difficulties by becoming more expressive. The Gladiator and Laocoön are advances on Phidias.

The Middle Ages did not know human beauty: they fled it, they hated it; the Gospel preached penance to them. Beauty was for them the source of sin. Renaissance artists were perhaps less distant from it than the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Roman Empire, and the Middle Ages; for their saints and their virgins belong to humanity; but they have only seen it in holiness and beatification.

We seek this human beauty, so rare, and it is up to us to produce it, since we wish to realize the rational conditions for well-being, tranquility, and progress. Man will only be in the fullness of his beauty when he exists in the fullness of his intelligence, his freedom, and his justice: until then, our works, if they are not critical, fall into fantasy, counterfeiting, lies, and POSING.

Look at all our paintings of mythology, religion, history, battles, genre: not a single natural character; all are contorted, convulsed, or draped as charlatans. Even in their photographs, our contemporary celebrities pose. The very attitudes have become

typical. Costume aside, one would recognize by gestures and facial expressions the warrior, the tribune, the priest, the magistrate, the worker. A woman, whatever her status, has only one way of posing, one type; this type, the most...

A considerable figure of our time, a type unknown to the Greeks, the Romans, the Italians of the Renaissance, where deified, sanctified beauty had nothing human about it, is the type of the pretty woman. 20

Nothing is easier than to paint the portrait of a charlatan; if I dared cite examples, they abound under my pen. Nothing is more difficult than to portray a modest scholar, a great, simple man, an honest man. There is no known type, and if we stick to individuality, it is impossible to escape one or the other of these drawbacks: either forcing the subject's expression, or compromising the work by its very vulgarity.

No doubt there are individual virtues, honest and excellent individuals. But these are individuals, incapable of providing a type, and in whose physiognomy it is impossible to capture in passing this expression of virtue, heroism, devotion, consequently the kind of beauty we desire.

Virtue—as Christianity itself has taught us—is modest; it does not flaunt itself, it flees the light of day; nothing is more difficult than to capture it in a flash of the eye or a reflection of the face. Ask an honest man, a worthy woman, to put themselves in the position they had when this or that good deed slipped out of their grasp; charge one of your mercenary models with playing this role. The ridiculousness of such a pretension is obvious. Human virtue, which must replace Christian virtue or piety among us, is not yet sufficiently developed to have shown itself typically on our faces: the most honest, the most learned, the bravest, the best, in short, often have only vulgar faces: nothing, moreover, characterizes them; for, as human conscience cannot always be tense; as the peak of virtue, on the contrary, is to become easy, natural, common; as it does not pose in the manner of monks, priests, Greek heroes, or Roman senators, it cannot be, at least until further notice, clearly captured and fixed by the painter; which makes its reproduction impossible, and any attempt intolerable.

The conclusion of all this is that the height of art, that summit to which artists must aspire, is still far from us; all the more so since it will take generations to create the types or models, highly skilled observers to discover them, and a public to recognize and understand them. So what should we do today? Wait until society, by reforming its economic and political organization, has been able to reform its morals; until by reforming its morals, it has been able to modify, recreate the faces. Then it will be

possible for the painter to observe and reproduce. Until then, we can only follow the work of criticism; we have no beatifications to make; we only have condemnations to pronounce...

20The reign of the pretty woman is contemporary with that of capitalist bankers, bourgeois millionaires, mercantile and industrial feudalism, the constitutional regime, and eclectic philosophy. The pretty woman is something essentially nineteenth-century; she is what she is, what we all know, what is impossible to define. She can add to this being peasant or bourgeois, queen or grisette, banker's or lawyer's wife, schoolteacher or actress, serious or dissipated, wise or frivolous, silly or witty, worldly or devout. She can be all of these indifferently. What we call a pretty woman can accommodate anything. Elegant and well-to-do, she founded the empire of fashion; but she never knew how to create a harmonious whole, and all her rag-picker fantasies are beneath the most ancient and barbaric costumes: Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Arab, Russian, Swiss, etc. She introduced, I know not how, corsets, hoop skirts, and crinolines; she made men ugly, arbitrarily mixing all the costumes and not knowing how to create or preserve any. She creates promiscuity in her own way by standardizing clothing, under the pretext of embellishing it. She readily associates pious jewelry with her attire. Queen of balls, waters, redoubts, shows, concerts, and festivals, it is by the light of candles, chandeliers, illuminations, and fireworks that the pretty woman shines in all her beauty and captivates the hearts of princes, soldiers, and bourgeois; it is there that she conquers a husband, often the prelude to so many other conquests. What she is in the morning, I do not know: a night beauty, a flower of the salons, she rises a little late, a little pale and tired. She has nothing in common with the fresh Dew, daughter of Twilight and Dawn, who vanishes each morning with the kisses of the rising Sun. There is a literature of pretty women, a music of

pretty women, an art of pretty women; there is even a science of pretty women. But there is no philosophy, no politics, no rights for pretty women, although there is a devotion for pretty women. The pretty woman is capable of jealousy, very different from Solomon's strong woman, who takes pity on her unfaithful man. She cannot bear criticism: then she rages, she stamps her feet, she scratches; she would play with a dagger. Fortunately, her pretty woman's hand is incapable of delivering assured blows. The pretty woman can be naughty; it is repugnant for her to be a criminal: she would be a monster. She possesses neither the sublimity of virtue nor of genius; her triumph is in the middle regions. She is the muse of unknown poets, the genius of average minds, the angel of modest ideas, of indulgent morals, of flexible virtues, the fortune of complacent husbands, the reward of the ambitious without principles, the fairy of self-effacing characters, the guardian of capitulations of conscience.

CHAPTER XXI

Affirmation of the Critical School – Objections – Personal Incident

The Critical School says: Art has so far only dealt with gods, heroes, and saints: it is time it dealt with mere mortals. By dint of idealizing, symbolizing, and seeking models above condition and destiny, it has ended up surrounding itself with fictions; it has lost itself in the void… What did art have to do with us, miserable humans, servile, ignoble, unsightly, and ugly rabble? you might ask. – One very interesting thing, the most glorious of all: it had to improve us, help us, save us. To improve us, we must first know us; to know us, we must see us as we are, not in a fantastic, indirect image that is no longer us. Thanks to critical art, man will become a mirror of himself, and it is in his own face that he will learn to contemplate his soul. Now, this exhibition of the human soul requires more insight, study, genius, more executive skill than Phidias and Raphael needed to produce their masterpieces. Let no one say, then, that the advent of the new school constitutes a decadence. Despite the multitude of artists and dabblers, we march, we disengage, we are a hundred pikes above the artists of the first Revolution and the first Empire: something that is completely unsuspected at the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

It is a strange misunderstanding of the thinking of the critical school to believe that it presents the moral and physical ugliness it depicts as unparalleled beauties, and that it aspires to change human opinion in this regard. It maintains, something incontestable, acknowledged throughout time, that the ugly, even the horrible, has its role in art; that it does not serve only to frighten imaginations by showing them the various degrees of moral and physical degradation, and that such lessons, necessary today, demand of the artist.

a depth of observation, a power of synthesis and superior ideality.

Remember that we no longer paint immortals, free from ugliness, as from suffering and illness, superior to all external influences, whose incorruptible nature and unalterable form can never have but one expression, nor consequently differ from themselves. These are transient creatures, suffering, sick, subject to error and vice, slaves to sin, and who must be brought back to health and reason, to lead them from there to virtue. The artist's mandate is therefore to reproduce them in all their affections, passions, and degradations, as in all their perfections. This immense variety belongs to him; it is his province, and that is why, the more changeable the expression, the more art must distance itself from all arbitrariness. If chance or clumsiness alone presided over such works, if they were caricatures or simple portraits, their execution would certainly be of little value, since even the most clumsy person could succeed. But we have already observed that these compositions, serious in their idea, are no less so in their form. They are not charges, hyperboles, which require only a little malice in the mind and very little art in the execution; they are typical compositions, taken from nature, from several natures, and reproduced in a rational composition where the form suggests the idea, where ugliness, while revealing vice, still suggests both natural beauty and innate virtue; which makes these works the most difficult of all. People insist and say: But what necessity is there in resorting to such extreme measures, and what pleasure, other than that of overcoming an enormous difficulty, can the artist expect from his work? There are handsome boys and pretty girls among the peasant class: why not stick to these models? In the bourgeoisie, the clergy, the judiciary, the army, there are similarly noble faces, just as there are great virtues and noble hearts. Why not stick to these distinguished natures? Can humanity be too beautiful, too honored? And must man occupy his talent, his poetic and imaginative faculty, in degrading himself even further? Is it not better to encourage him with fine examples than to humiliate him with the image of vice? Emperor Constantine said that if he saw a priest fall into sin, he would cover him with his imperial mantle. Constantine understood true pedagogy; he had a true appreciation of art. Better excitement than depression. Beautiful models than the faces of scoundrels and the damned! What good is this display of peasant vileness, of fatness?

bourgeois and clerical Epicureanism? The art you advocate is that of hell; we would prefer that of the heavenly abode. There, Tisiphone, they say, presents the damned with a mirror in which they recognize themselves: which makes them unbearable to themselves; send us instead a guardian angel who will show us what we can be, and what we will be by following wisdom. So, I will reply to these critics, you accept art only as flattery, perpetual embellishment, a lie, and, the word comes naturally, a SEDUCTION? What you need are Vincent de Pauls becoming galley slaves out of charity; Fénelons bandaging the wounds of the wounded; the sister or lady of charity appearing, like the angel of consolation, in an attic; It is Hippocrates, majestic, refusing the gifts of Artaxerxes; Lucretia, more beautiful than Venus herself, stabbing herself after Sextus's attempt on her life; Sabina between a robust Tatius and a young and superb Romulus, causing the parricidal weapons to fall; there are ravishing Saint Margarets; charming Saint Cecilias; mothers of sorrow like Niobe; Saint Sebastians more beautiful than Mercury, Bacchus, and the fauns; and even the volunteers of 92 who arrived in clogs, combed and musky like the former! – May the Spinner be full of health, fine; but may she be elegant, slender, and airy as befits a woman, and as indicated by the thin thread she pulls from her fingers. – May the bourgeois woman, at forty, be plump, if that pleases you; but let this fleshy beauty redeem what age has given it in excess with the charm peculiar to the rose that is about to fade, to the fruit that will soon fall, and which give it all its flavor and fragrance. This is what you ask for: makeup, false teeth, vermilion, carmine, preserves, refining, compensation, and always lies, corruption.

Is this the worker in the nineteenth century? you ask, seeing The Stone Breakers. No, not quite, certainly; it is one of the scenes of his life, one of the fatalities of his existence; the conclusion of a life of poorly paid work, poorly served by intelligence, without dignity, without elevation. To that you reply: Very well. But let Mr. Courbet make us at this hour, in his virile beauty and his intelligent dignity, the WORKER!

Where do you want him to get it? An ignorant man will paint you a picture of a handsome man with an aquiline nose, a full black beard, the torso of Milo, the arms of an athlete, a forehead of genius to boot, with the flash of liberty in his eyes. He will put a hammer in his hand, and you will say: There's the worker.

A lie: it's a fantasy figure, a pose. I've seen some of these workers, good devils at heart, but who already posed as types, as if their image,

fixed by the brush, should have passed down to posterity. And I thought as I looked at them: Posing, lying.

As for me, I confess, I abhor lies, fiction, convention, allegory, hypocrisy, flattery, as much in painting as in politics and in style; I no more want to be a flatterer of the masses than of princes; and if it is true, as everyone recognizes, that we live in an age of decadence, where civic courage is annihilated, private virtue is suffering, the race is depressed, all feelings distorted and depraved, I say that, far from making it a subject of dissimulation, we must begin by saying and showing things as they are. Otherwise, we are being made a mockery of ourselves. We must be given cod liver, and we are offered sugared water!… – Our era, rich in police force but empty of principles and morals, calm on the surface, is fundamentally revolutionary. Art must be revolutionary too. All regeneration presupposes a prior death; all restoration a demolition. Consider Christianity: it too conceived of man as immortal, ideal, living at the beginning in an earthly paradise, and destined for a supernatural bliss. Yet it preaches confession, absolution, penance. Confession is the painting we need today. No quarter!... Courbet has in his head soldiers, magistrates, academics, voters, candidates, bankers, speculators, professors, workers, students, nuns, women from the market hall, from the Saint-Germain and Breda districts, from high industry and the riffraff, just as he has priests, peasants, prostitutes, and bourgeois women. Let him show us all these people; let him parade all these sad realities before us, and we will be grateful. Let him scalp us, anatomize us, undress us: it is his right and his duty. By executing us in this way, he serves history and posterity. Honor then to Courbet, who, the first among painters, imitating Molière and translating the high comedy of the theater into painting, seriously undertook to warn us, to chastise us, to improve us, by first painting us as we are; who, instead of amusing us with fables, of flattering us with illuminations, had the courage to show our image, not as nature intended it, but as our passions and vices make it.

In vain you say to her: Awaken this pretty woman; make this body, a little thinner, sparkle electrically; on this forehead, on these lips,

place a gleam, a smile of intelligence; instead of fifteen hundred francs, your

spinner will be worth fifteen thousand, and you will enter among the Immortals. Similarly, could you not have placed, in the Burial, the figures of your priests more in harmony with the grandeur of the holy ministry? shown more consideration for our delicacy, in these vergers' heads, in these peasants, in these bourgeois? What would it have cost you? Would you be any less of a great artist? Courbet replies: What you are asking me is a lie, a chimera, an allegorical creation, a coupling of things that repel each other, an impossible combination. It is the death of art, the negation of myself. You recognize some talent in me, and you do not see that the truth alone sustains me; that I would soon be at the level of so many others; that my mind would be depraved, my hand without vigor, my brush faltering, if I listened to you. What! You want me to take my model from the Boulevard des Italiens or the Breda district to represent a spinner? Indignity! Show me Lucretias, women of royal blood holding the distaff, and I will make you Lucretias; but I could not invent them. What I would give you as such would be fantasy? Idealism, that is to say, given our morals, always prostitution. Consider then, I beg you, that nowadays human and dignified beauty, true beauty, is found among us only in suffering and pain; that we hardly find it any more in our petty passions. That is why my women who weep at the Funeral are beautiful; and it cost me little, I swear, to make them like that; that is why my Dying Duelist is beautiful; Why are my young people who exchange a frank glance of love on their way back from the fair interesting; Why does this Maiden of the Empire, breathing Venus entirely, burning with desire, and who seems to want to devour the grass, retain a glint of beauty, the strength of passion restoring to her a remnant of dignity that vice has ravaged. You cite to me the Dutch and the Flemish who, in their fairs, their weddings, their assemblies, in their domestic interiors, and even in their cabarets, are joyful; they please, they amuse. No doubt! But this proves once again what I have just said: that there is no resource for the artist except in the truth of observation. The authors of these paintings had before their eyes a gay, rich, and laughing society; they were happier than we are. Today, do you know who poses for the painter? Avarice, gambling, pride, lust, greedy and idle softness, ferocious parasitism, prostitution. I can only give back to the public

what it lends me: it's not my fault if it shrinks from its image.

Human, critical art, as it has revealed itself before our eyes, is repelled, first by public imbecility, prejudice, and corruption; then by the hostility of Academies, the Church, cliques, and those in power. The same causes that, for seventy years, have halted the development of liberty, halt the rise of art: popular prejudice, national ignorance, false taste, character flaws, hidden corruption, selfishness. We cherish our unworthiness, we adore our servitude, we bless our privileges and our profiteering, fathers of pauperism.

These causes manifest themselves in yet another form: literary decadence. All inspiration dies, because justice is dead. Art will one day be reborn, and literature with it, and liberty likewise. I don't believe it will happen anytime soon, especially not in France.

France, well studied, has constantly proclaimed, for seventy years, through all the mouths of fame, its incurable impotence. It is happy to be amused; it even demands, the hypocrite, that while being amused, certain proprieties be maintained: nothing delights it like subtle naughtiness, veiled immodesty. Deep down, it cares neither for literature nor art, any more than for law or morality. Everything that is uttered on this subject in academies, colleges, newspapers, theaters, courts, is pure fiction, in which no one believes. We must, by an effort of reason, free art from its old rut: it will not be done; the artist is treated like the writer.

Who brings literature to life? New ideas, produced with vigor and youth; not academic discourses.

I can cite myself without pride, because I have suffered persecution for twenty-five years. I have contributed in my part, a small part, if you will, to the progress of language and literature. Three men in political economy, Say, Blanqui, Bastiat, although their writings are full of errors, their theories are essentially contradictory, and none of them was able to understand the fundamental law of science, have enriched the language in which they wrote through their style. I dare to name myself alongside these three economists. Now, what have I gained?

I do not complain that I have been fought: at this moment it is not a question of doctrines, but of style; of substance, but of form. Has there been a single humanities professor who told his students, the

public, that in the nineteenth century, since the Restoration, a new genre was emerging in French literature, a very difficult genre, since among ordinary writers it inevitably falls into banality and boredom, but which, through its analogies with style,

legal, nonetheless constitutes one of the domains of language? Does anyone suspect in colleges, at the Institute, that literature includes other genres—in verse, the epic, dramatic, didactic poem, the song, the ode, the fable, the tale;—in prose, the novel, history, religious, political, academic, or judicial eloquence? Does anyone imagine that a language as well-constructed as ours can be used for anything other than books known in advance?

What have I, for my part, received? Trials, convictions, prison, exile. Why can't I obtain permission to publish a newspaper? The public, with rare exceptions, does not have the time to read books and pamphlets: it wants to be instructed in detail; He willingly agrees to devote half an hour a day to reading, during his lunch or dinner; he doesn't go beyond that. Therefore, all ideas, all questions, all opinions, all causes, must pass through the periodical press, whose pages are distributed from five to twenty centimes. The government, which knows this, precisely doesn't want it; it makes the press a privilege granted to reliable men, without prejudice to the rigorous prosecutions carried out against books and pamphlets. And to save a dynasty, a personality, a policy, the spirit of a people is executed; the idea is killed with the form. And there are writers, so-called liberals, who applaud, saying that the press is powerless!... Art is treated like the idea, like literature, like the press. Artists are told: What are you complaining about? What do you lack? Don't religion, history, fantasy, all of nature offer you a wide enough field? Paint us pictures of piety, scenes from the lives of great men, beautiful landscapes; paint us comical pictures, you know?... and be assured that national self-esteem is too fond of glory not to reward you.

They shave us, they castrate us, they handcuff us and muzzle us; they cut out our tongues, and we find that nice; and when M. de Girardin jokes about it, we say: He's still a man with ideas, this M. de Girardin!...

CHAPTER XXII

Of Art in Its Relationship with Conscience

An art critic, Mr. Wintz, whose curious pamphlet I read with interest, wittily mocks those who claim that one can only paint what one has seen. Indeed, it is the opposite, he says: one paints, from what one has seen, what one has not seen. But there is one point that Mr. Wintz must concede: one is only truly an artist by painting what one believes, what one loves, what one hopes for, or what one hates. Now, who today believes in eternal life, in miracles, for example?... The priest in the exercise of his functions no longer means anything to us; he is an actor: cover a mannequin with a cassock, it will serve you just as well. Depicting the priest at the altar, or in the pulpit, or at catechism, or at the sickbed, has been the prerogative of Christian art, which is no longer of our century. A painting of priests in the exercise of their functions would have value today only to the extent that it highlighted the secret contradiction that exists between the conscience of these men, their private lives, their faith; as, for example, when the confessor, exhorting an old woman on the verge of death, asks her for her fortune for the Church.

Religious paintings, it is a fact recognized by all, are today of a despairing mediocrity. Why? Because there is no longer any religious conscience, neither among artists nor among the masses.

Art quickly declines when it ceases to deeply interest the conscience, when it becomes indifferent to it, when it is nothing more than an object of curiosity or luxury. Despite the value they may have acquired as professionals, our artists will therefore always be inferior to the ancients when they want to recreate their works. Not only are they inferior to them, but they also interest us much less.

What does Egyptian art with its pyramids and symbols mean to me? A subject of historical study, of archaeology, of the history of the soul and of art itself, it is for me an object of pure curiosity. But then? Does my consciousness resemble an Egyptian consciousness?

What do the monuments of Greek art itself mean to me? I can certainly, by comparison, judge that Greek artists were incomparably more skilled than the Egyptians; that their works are more beautiful, denote a deeper and purer sense of beauty, and therefore bear witness to a progress in art. I will conclude that, notwithstanding the admiring texts of some old historians, Greek consciousness in the century of Phidias is superior to Egyptian consciousness in the time of Sesostris. I see all this, I observe it; I am interested in it as a man, like a son of a family in the relics of his ancestors; But, once again, what do these statues of gods and goddesses, these temple bas-reliefs, these colonnades, these porticoes have to do with me? What does all this mean to me? Absolutely nothing. What does it matter to my soul? Greek art, as well as Egyptian art, is finished, exhausted, and humanity endures forever.

No doubt, for apprentice artists, these old monuments are of great importance: they show the origins and have become for us means, elements; we discover in them the inventions of stone carving, of the column, the applications of statics. But all this has lost its aesthetic effect on us.

The Venus de Milo will seem to me, if you like, the masterpiece of statuary. Very well! What do you expect me to make of it, a citizen of the nineteenth century, barely freed from Christianity? If I reflect that this statue was the image of a divinity, it makes me smile, and all the aesthetic charm vanishes. I will place a miniature of this figure on my mantelpiece, as I place a rare shell, a piece of porcelain, or a crystal vase. Yet, for these latter objects, I need no study: whereas a statuette of Venus presupposes that the owner knows mythology, has been to college, has read the authors, has a grasp of art history, and understands that the Greeks are among our ancestors. How many connections there are between Greek art and me! How many middle terms!

For example, why are these Venuses naked? Who could have allowed themselves to depict them like this, when the exhibition of

a nude statuette of a bourgeois woman would be punished? What connection does this nudity have with my conscience? How can I convince myself that the gods must be represented, that they are naked, and this precisely because they are gods? What moral excitement can I

What can I expect from these Venuses, these nymphs, these Graces, these Muses? I know that the divine beauty of Greek statues is that it does not arouse any dishonest feelings: this must have been true especially of the Greeks. But I, for the first quarter of an hour, will remain calm; if I prolong my contemplation, if I return to it every day, this beauty will end up suggesting impure thoughts to me: proof that it is not made for me, that its perfection is only relative and its aesthetic effect temporary; outside of this environment it becomes ugly. In a word, I am happy for the work of art to please my imagination; I even consent to it flattering my senses, although my freedom is frightened by this flattery, like a virgin recoils at the touch of a strange man's hand; But I demand above all that it speak to my intelligence and my heart, and that, rising even higher, it reach my consciousness. For this, it must be the representation and product of this consciousness, its mirror, its interpreter, and, consequently, its exciter.

It is through this secret relationship that a work of art, mediocre in conception and execution, can excite to the highest degree the aesthetic feeling, and consequently all the faculties of consciousness; whereas, if this relationship is lacking, if the soul has become tough, the most beautiful work remains sterile; it is aesthetically as if it did not exist.

Men who love women for their youth, their beauty, their grace, their sweetness, find them lovely in all their attire. I do not deny that finement adds to beauty; art is not the enemy of wealth; On the contrary, only it can give it prestige; but it supplements it advantageously. A simple ribbon from a loved one will be precious, while the most beautiful wedding dress, the richest wedding basket will be of no interest to those to whom the new bride is a stranger. What do her necklaces, her bracelets, her lace matter to them?

When I was a child, the church I went to every Sunday seemed to me the most beautiful, the most grandiose of buildings; why? Because of the intimate relationship between the purpose of the

monument and the religious state of my conscience. With time, reflection would have revealed its flaws; I would have had other architectural conceptions; but a great aesthetic effect would nonetheless have been produced, which, purified by analysis, would have created in me a power of development and progress, which would not have existed without it. It is not the most sumptuous, the most sublime masterpieces that achieve the greatest effects: they are themselves the culmination of a

aesthetic progress created by much lesser works. Not that I mean that it is useless for artists to take so much trouble; I only mean that they work in vain, if they do not establish a direct and intimate relationship with the consciousness of their century; so in vain that, this essential condition neglected, art, without object, without purpose, without reason, without direction, without criteria, ends up degrading and no longer being art; it is trinkets. Note with what care Leviticus describes the ornaments, ultimately so poor, of the Tabernacle, and Book III of Kings, the Temple of Solomon. How one feels, reading them, that the entire soul of the people hangs on the narrator's lips; that their heart, their thoughts, their love, are in these monuments! Did the Greek theater or the Roman circus ever arouse an enthusiasm equal to that produced by the mere hope of visiting the temple, of the Ascension to Jerusalem? The psalms are full of them: Loetatus sum in his quoe dicta sunt mihi: in domum Domini ibimus. How the legislator captures hearts with the image of beauty! And at the same time, how, through religion and overexcited rationality, he increases the energy of aesthetic feeling and provokes manifestations of art! Yet this was happening among a people whose religion proscribed painting and statuary.

Have our art exhibitions, with their thousands of paintings, engravings, and statues, ever produced on the masses an effect comparable to that of the Corpus Christi procession and the visit to tombs on Maundy Thursday? What, however, could be poorer than the means deployed by the clergy and the parishes? But consciences were united: everyone took part in the matter. Also, just as Emperor Napoleon I admitted that he himself found nothing more beautiful than an army drawn up in battle formation and performing its parades, so, in the age of faith, no Catholic could boast of having seen anything more beautiful than a procession.

Fifty years ago, the first thing a man did when he arrived for the

first time in a city, or even a simple village, was to visit its churches; these, along with the town halls, were the only monuments of art of any interest. Let us not be surprised by the development of religious art in all epochs, without distinction of genre: Byzantine, Gothic, or Greco-Roman architecture, painting, statuary, music: of all the arts, it is the one that, in epochs of faith, most deeply captures, interests, and touches the masses. In the Church, in religion, everything is poetry and music. There is a poem, a sort of lyrical drama, I almost said opera, for every day of the year,

with an appropriate hymn. All celebrations are sung: Advent, Christmas, Lent, the Passion of Jesus Christ, His Resurrection, His Ascension, the institution of the Eucharist, the Assumption of the Virgin, the commemoration of the saints. There is a melody for the prayer or Pater, another for the profession of faith or creed, another for the consecration; there is an office for the dead, a marriage office, a first communion office.

Freemasonry has gestures, signs, drums, formulas. The army has call-outs, fanfares for all the soldier's actions: the Diana or reveille, the recall, the assembly, the general, the ordinary march, the quick march, the charging march, the retreat, the saddle-up, the curfew; finally, the element of war.

All peoples have obeyed this law: there are fanfares for hunting, grazing, fishing, and rowing; war dances, religious dances, wedding dances, and social dances.

In 1889, we made the revolution to the songs of the Carmagnole, the Ça ira, the Marseillaise, and the Chant du départ, just as the Spartans once sang to the songs of Tyrtée, and the Franks to the songs of their bards.

During my captivity at Sainte-Pélagie in 1849, there were as many as eighty political prisoners, a tiny number, considering the thousands of deportees of that sad era. Every evening, half an hour before the cells were closed, the inmates gathered in the courtyard and sang the prayer; it was a hymn to Liberty attributed to Armand Marrast. A single voice recited the verse, and the eighty prisoners took up the refrain, which was then repeated by the five hundred unfortunate inmates in the other part of the prison. Later, these

songs were banned, and for the prisoners it was a real aggravation of their sentence. It was real music, realistic, applied, art in context, like the songs in church, the fanfares on parade, and no music pleases me more.

I don't understand concert and salon music: I can't explain how it amuses and gives pleasure. These are lessons that are repeated, and I am not a teacher. As much as I love the Stabat in church, on Lenten evenings, the Dies iræ at a death mass, an oratorio in a cathedral, a hunting air in the woods, a military march on a promenade, anything out of place displeases me. The concert is the death of music.

When, by chance, there is music at a great ceremony or public solemnity, it is irrelevant to the purpose of the gathering. At a prize-giving ceremony, the overture to La Dame Blanche will be played; at the erection of a statue, a

Beethoven's symphony; at an agricultural convention, an aria from La Favorite; at a shareholders' meeting, nothing at all.

The Legislative Body meets: no music, except to escort the Emperor when he comes to read his message. They have done what they can to banish eloquence, which now seems comical and in bad taste; they speak from their places, in the most common, bourgeois manner, as among our English neighbors.

In the past, when sitting down to table, they recited the Benedicite, and, after the meal, the Graces; it was civility, art as much as devotion. Upon entering school, they invoked the Holy Spirit. In the courtyards of the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, nothing is said anymore: not the slightest sign to recall the seriousness, the dignity of the matter; One enters there as if into a tavern, and begins to listen as one begins to drink in a tavern.

All justice was surrounded by formalities that were also poetry: this is reduced to the simplest expression.

Many of these ancient customs cannot be restored; once serious and dignified, they would seem childish and ridiculous to us. But we cannot remain without compensation. Art, the product and exciter of consciousness, is born with man and society. From the first day it reveals itself, not as a fantasy, but as a serious faculty, an essential

manifestation of being, a condition of its life; it enters reality, into the intimacy of existence; art envelops humanity as with a mantle of glory: this is its destiny; this is its goal. Our entire life, our words, our actions, even the most vulgar, our homes, everything we do, everything we are, calls for art and demands to be elevated by it. It is art that saves us from coarseness, banality, vulgarity, triviality, and indignity; it is art that civilizes us, urbanizes us, polishes us, ennobles us.

One day we will sing at harvest time, at haymaking, at grape harvest, at sowing, at school, at the workshop. Today we no longer sing, except for banter and flat nonsense; we hate verse, we disfigure our prose, and we dance the cancan.

We cannot live in this barbarism; we must rise from it at all costs, while maintaining our scientific gravitas and our industrial positivism. These are other means to be employed, other forms to be created, other arrangements to be imagined. The earth must become, through cultivation, like an immense garden, and work, through its organization, a vast concert.

What contribution does art make to this enterprise of renovation?

None; we have no national artistic production, not even any criteria for the appreciation of the works produced, because there is, at the bottom of the public conscience, only doubt, skepticism, lack of principles, neglect of the law, a spirit of profiteering, parasitism, and arbitrariness; disdain for all philosophy and religion; immodesty, venality, prostitution.

The contemporary bourgeoisie, coarse and ostentatious, imagines that it can do anything with money; that all it has to do is offer encouragement, distribute prizes, crosses, pensions; and pass laws on literary property to encourage writers and artists. She's always like M. Jourdain, asking that her declaration of love be rendered in fashionable style: "Beautiful Marquise, your beautiful eyes..." How can we make these people, for whom the idea is of no importance, understand that, in literature as in art, the idea is everything; that one will never be a Tacitus when one thinks like Messrs. Guizot and Thiers; that, to write The Old Cordelier, one had to be guillotined?...

CHAPTER XXIII

Aesthetic Testimonies of National Consciousness – Modern Monuments and Embellishments of Paris

Art has an intimate relationship with religion, philosophy, justice, utility, in a word, with all the FACULTIES OF CONSCIENCE, which it aims to reproduce, manifest, and excite. Just as one can judge the conscience of a people by its religion, its laws, its government, its economy, one can also judge it by its aesthetic manifestations. And since government, religion, laws, philosophy, and art are proportional to the energy of conscience, one can conclude from the weakness, backwardness, or corruption of the former to the infirmity, decrepitude, or corruption of the latter. What aesthetic testimonies will our era leave to future generations?

I will not return to the prostituted statuary and painting. In this chapter, I will limit myself to asking about the significance of Paris's modern monuments and embellishments.

It is a matter of dignity for a civilized people to have museums of antiquities. This is important to history, to our sense of progress, to the understanding of art in its various eras, and consequently to our own, to the feeling of solidarity with our ancestors.

I therefore approve of the restoration of cathedrals and palaces, when the costs are not too high; the acquisition of statues. Place these objects in your museums, halls, courtyards, and gardens; do not place them in your public squares, where only national monuments have the right to be displayed. What is the Luxor obelisk doing on the Place de la Concorde?... It should have been placed in the center of the Louvre courtyard.

In ancient Egypt, the entrance to a temple was preceded by at least two

obelisks, placed on either side, in front of the door, like two sentinels. Sometimes, between the door and the obelisks, there was a double row of gigantic figures. Now, what were these obelisks laden with hieroglyphics? Stones bearing an inscription indicating the time of construction, the name of the founder, the occasion of the foundation, and all its circumstances: a veritable record of the monument, a sort of summary of its history, its purpose, much like our tomb inscriptions, or like the table placed at the beginning of a work, indicating its substance and providing its analysis.

The purpose of the obelisk was therefore not only architectural or artistic; it had a mnemonic purpose, a positivist character. The shape was that of a needle, because the characters were read from top to bottom, and the elevation here offered more advantage to writing than the horizontal dimension. The obelisks were coupled like the two leaves of the door, because symmetry dictated it.

Now, look what a strange people we are! We went to fetch at great expense, with the permission of the Pasha of Egypt, an Arab or Turk by origin, who cares nothing for antiquities, one of the obelisks from the temple of Luxor; we erected it in the middle of the Place de la Concorde, where it cuts as strange a figure as a prie-dieu would in the Bourse hall; and we took great care to place on the pedestal of this singular monument, on one side, an inscription indicating the year, the reign, under which the obelisk was brought; on the other, the figure of the machines that were used for its erection: so that we seem to have transported it to Paris solely to give ourselves the pleasure of seeing how an engineer, graduated from our École Polytechnique, would manage to erect it! Certainly, I do not place French civilization below that of the Egyptians of Sesostris; but I find it hard to imagine that they would have been capable of such stupidity. What! On this revolutionary square, which has already changed its name two or three times, where so many great scenes have taken place, we have only been able to erect two mythological fountains, quite pretty, moreover, and an Egyptian obelisk!... Our arts are bric-a-brac. We make a church a pantheon of great men; we inscribe on the frontispiece of this church a usurpatory, mendacious dedication; Because the church of Soufflot was dedicated to Saint Genevieve; it is the second cathedral of Paris. On the other hand, we are remaking the Temple of Glory, a parallelogram imitated from the Greeks, into a so-called church (the

Madeleine), without bells, without chapels, without a clock, without a Christian form. The whole of

Our monuments denote a people whose conscience is empty and whose nationality is dead. We have nothing in our conscience, neither faith, nor law, nor morality, nor philosophy, nor economic sense, but ostentation, pure arbitrariness, nonsense, disguise, lies, and sensuality.

Cross the Pont de Solférino and ask yourself what it's doing there. A simple pedestrian bridge would have sufficed: it would have saved them a few hundred meters while the Tuileries Gardens are open. But the bridge is well built, beautifully designed, and appears solid; it is therefore a bridge for carriages. What path does it spare them? None. Could it have been built solely to bear the name of a battle won by Napoleon III? What leads one to suppose this is the twelve pedestals that were provided, six on each side, each capable of holding a Victory and bearing its name. Unfortunately, the victories they wanted to illustrate are only six in number: Montebello, Palestro, Turbigo, Magenta, Melegnano, Solferino. How did they get out of this difficulty? By repeating each name twice on the monument. It's laughable! They could just as easily have been repeated ten times: it would have made a kaleidoscope. Why a Solferino Bridge and a Pont de l'Alma; a Boulevard de Magenta and a Boulevard de Sébastopol? Why a Rue de Turbigo? One might answer: Because we already have a Pont d'Austerlitz and a Pont d'Iéna; a Rue de Castiglione and a Rue de Rivoli. But why, under Louis XIV, didn't we have a Rue de Rocroi, a Rue de Denain? Because common sense said that, to be logical, we should also have a Rue de Bleinheim. The task of recounting victories and defeats was left to the annalists. Why didn't we do the same? My patriotic pride is satisfied to read on the maps of Paris the streets of Rivoli, Castiglione, Austerlitz, and others. But, to be fair to the Emperor and to ourselves, to make the lesson effective, we should also have included the streets of Trafalgar, Vittoria, Leipzig, and Waterloo.

Let us transport ourselves to the Place Vendôme and raise our eyes to the crowning glory of the building.

The statue of Napoleon, with his little hat and gray frock coat, was beautiful, not without majesty, and of great character, moreover, popular. This statue was real; it was not wanted. It is certain that

Napoleon I himself, simple, natural, and sometimes grand in his daily life, beneath these truly sculptural aspects, had a love of costumes and disguises. Bad taste, certainly.

But why didn't Napoleon adopt, instead of the Roman purple, the

Charlemagne's cloak, the restorer of the Roman Empire, the intermediary between Caesar and himself: Charlemagne, with whom Napoleon, supporter of the Church, victor over foreign coalitions, had more in common than with Caesar, conqueror of Gaul, but party leader, vanquisher of the patriciate, perpetual dictator? – It is because in the feudal world or the Middle Ages, France, as a kingdom, is the antithesis of the empire, and that ultimately Charlemagne is not Gallic; he is not of the Gallo-Roman race, of the Gallo-Roman civilization: he is Germanic.

Why then, if Napoleon was so keen to assert Gallo-Latin supremacy against Germanism, didn't he simply present himself as the successor of Hugh Capet, Louis the Fat, Philip Augustus, Saint Louis, Charles V, Louis XI, Louis XII, Francis I, Henry IV, Richelieu, and Louis XIV? Why this counterfeit of the Roman Empire, this renunciation of the succession to Charlemagne, of the French monarchy?

How many lies, inconsistencies, misinterpretations, and absurdities were accumulated to give himself a title and a fanciful costume, and to create art that was false, anti-national, unpopular, and absurd!… They have just restored to Napoleon the costume of the Roman emperors. I understand absolutely nothing about this restoration. I looked as best I could at this incredible statue; I looked at it from the Tuileries Garden; I looked at it from the very spot; I looked at it from the right and the left, from the front and the back, and the scandal only grew: misinterpretation, absurdity, falsehood, ugliness —it has it all.

Napoleon is depicted as a Roman emperor, they say; why not rather as an emperor of the French? What does this allusion to the Caesars mean? Is it because Napoleon III is writing the history of the first among them? Is it a prophecy? A symbol? A myth? A hope?... This supposed Roman emperor carries the globe surmounted by the cross. Some malicious jokers have said that he resembles a man in his dressing gown, holding his candlestick in his hand, about to go

to bed. How can this supposed Roman emperor be adorned with this emblem, which was that of Charlemagne, the Catholic emperor, and his descendants? What is this mixture of Christian, papal empire and Caesarist, polytheistic empire? For in every other respect, it is indeed a Roman emperor that they wanted to create, like those whose effigies survive: breastplate over the chest, skirt, bare legs. Here the domed breastplate seems borrowed from imperial museums; the skirt, raised too high, reaching the pit of the stomach, like the hideous dresses of the First Empire, gives the emperor the appearance of a cook. Seen from a distance, one would mistake him for a Zouave, with his jacket clinging to

At the top, floating at the bottom, blending into the wide trousers, beneath which the legs appear; and the head perched on a long neck, like that of a vulture on its bare neck.

The new statue of Napoleon is a sign of the times. In France, since Louis XIV, architecture, sculpture, and painting have increasingly stripped all national character. What is the Vendôme Column?

A very servile imitation of Trajan's Column. What is the Bourse?

What is the Madeleine? What is Notre-Dame de Lorette? What is Sainte-Clotilde? What are the Arc de Triomphe and the Carrousel?

The best things about the embellishments of Paris are, along with the central markets, which I will discuss shortly, the squares, imported from England, and the benches on the boulevards, which we also did not initiate. In 1858, there were none in Paris; at the same time, I found them everywhere in Brussels.

Here I anticipate an objection.

The Greeks, I will be told, left us five orders of architecture. The Romans invented the vault; then came Romanesque. The northern peoples, whose gables were very high to protect against rainwater and snow, invented the pointed arch and the Gothic style. From the Renaissance onward, the Roman vault was placed on the Greek entablature, and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Les Invalides, and the Pantheon were built. It's all very well, certainly, especially since we seemed to have run out of ideas. What more could we possibly invent? There aren't thirty-six ways to draw and detach columns, to give them a base, a capital; to raise a dome or a cellar, to build a

bridge, an aqueduct… We persist in asking architects for something new: they can only reasonably give us something old. After giving us Greek and Roman, they gave us Gothic and Renaissance. Now that we're jaded by all these imitations, they give us something oriental. In place of the round, oval, or low vault, they give us onions, tulip bulbs. The more we ask them for something new, the more, to satisfy us, they will fall into the irrational and the absurd, into the ridiculous and the ugly.

No doubt! But what does all this prove? That once its purpose is fulfilled, once the useful has been achieved,

art, as a search for expression, must know when to stop;

that otherwise it degenerates into childishness; that, in the current system, the encouragements, so poorly understood, even more useless, given to art, are a

Mystification.

Let us take a broader view.

What is the purpose of this great development of literature, which we have witnessed in France since the seventeenth century?

It is to teach us this: that an honest man must know how to speak and write correctly in his language, to express himself clearly and precisely; and, depending on his profession, be able to draft, with order and elegance, a report, a proclamation, to formulate and justify his opinion, to hold a conversation. If he is a professor, he must rise even higher: to recount the models, to explain them.

Having achieved this to a sufficient degree, the honest man will leave prose and verse, novels and plays, to professors; and scholarship, archaeology, and annals to professors. On occasion, his natural eloquence, supported by sound reason and a strong conscience, will shine through: he will leave the art of oratory to lawyers and artists, who will never equal him.

Often, taste dictates that the only ideal should be naked truth, pure idea or reality. This rule is especially true in literature, where a simple, clear, precise, and correct style, devoid of figures of speech, should, as far as possible, form the major part of the discourse. This style is like the sculptural art of the Greeks, which disdained

ornamentation and, in the smallest things, always shone with the sheer beauty of form. This style, which in a way conceals itself to reveal only its idea, is the most ideal of styles. It is the one that constitutes Voltaire's superiority. It is also the most difficult to attain. An idea expressed in this way is like a cut diamond which, though as clear and transparent as air, is nevertheless easily seen in that same air; whereas the flame of a candle, held up to the light, is extinguished.

It is true that such a style presupposes an idea to support it; without it, one has only words. Thus, most writers do otherwise. Whether through impotence, lack of ideas, or poor taste—for simplicity of style demands more artistry than figures of speech and imagery—they indulge in every conceivable fantasy, every unimaginable exercise.

What I say of literature, I say of the visual arts, of painting, sculpture, and architecture.

If the decorative value of a monument is to reveal its purpose from the outside, the two architectural masterpieces of Paris are, without question, the Mazas prison and the central market halls.

When, from the Vincennes railway, one looks down upon the long, radiant galleries of the new Force, with its unplastered walls, its twelve hundred cells, its days of suffering, its tightly spaced bars, its ten-square-meter exercise yards, one feels a chill in the heart, a constriction in the stomach: one senses that everything here has been meticulously and patiently designed to make life as unbearable as it can be in a society where corporal punishment has given way to moral torture. And when one considers that the prisoners locked in this gigantic tomb are defendants, that is to say, accused persons presumed innocent until proven guilty, one wonders what punishment the law reserves for the condemned, for criminals, and what moral ideal governs the prison system in France. Mazas is an architectural design worthy of standing alongside the most philosophical works of the critical school. The sight of this monument can only hasten, through the horror it inspires, the reform of the laws and customs of our governments, in matters of both prevention and repression. Name me a monument to our glories of such striking idealism, of such profound teaching!

The central market halls caused a great scandal among the academic community, students and professors alike. There, indeed, were no columns, no pilasters, no cornices, no attics; no capitals, no modillions, no cartouches, no statues, no bas-reliefs; stone in the foundations, iron from the ground to the roof, a glass and zinc roof: none of this was foreseen by the Institute and the School. Thus, the market halls are a monument to barbarity; a theft from the artists for whom the works of the city and the state are their property; a diversion of commissions for the benefit of the modest draftsmen, modelers, and founders of the Mazières factory.

But the public sided with the industrialists against the artists, and they were right. The ideal market, where readily perishable materials are piled up, would be open-air; the harshness of our climate not permitting this, the best solution would be for the roof to be suspended, in a way, by a bracket at the top, like a lamp from the ceiling; the support point still lacking on that side, the columns intended to support the roof must take up as little space as possible; plenty of air, plenty of water, such was the utilitarian, sanitary program. The engineer of the central market halls understood this: nothing in excess in his monument; He sought only simplicity, and he found grandeur. Let the academics prefer a heap of stones, more or less symmetrical, without air, without light, with typhus permanently present, like

In the sort of bastille or prison that still stands opposite the church of Saint-Eustache, or in the other walled markets of Paris: the public now knows what a monument of public utility can and should be, and it will no longer be fooled by charlatans of form and ideal, devoid of conscience and idea. The aim of art is to teach us to blend the pleasant with the useful in all aspects of our lives; to thus increase the convenience of objects for us, and thereby add to our own dignity.

The first thing we must take care of is housing. The great matter is that the people be well housed: something all the more fitting since they are sovereign and king.

Yet, the dwelling of the citizen, of the average person, has not yet been found. We do not have the minimum housing, nor the minimum wage.

Artists demand works of art—that is, palaces, churches, museums, theaters, monuments; their art has not succeeded in providing us with shelter; on the contrary, the luxury of the buildings to which they encourage us has become an aid to misery.

One must compare a city in Holland or Switzerland with Spanish or Oriental cities: it is there that one will discern the destiny of art.

Art has done nothing for the Greeks, the Italians, or the Spanish, who have remained iconolatrists. Look at Constantinople, Rome, and Naples. For art to fulfill its destiny, to reach its ultimate limit and achieve its purpose, it is necessary that humanity learn to value its soul and conscience more than its body. Look at the household of a woman in the Netherlands, and compare that household with that of a bluestocking or a courtesan. Consider also the Protestant villages of Switzerland (Vaud and Neuchâtel), and compare them with the Catholic French villages that border them.

The freedom, the individuality, the dignity of character that distinguish the Swiss, the Dutch, that is RESEARCHED ART. And this art is sorely neglected in France, it must be said.

I leave aside the question of affordability, without which life is nothing but servitude. – If the republic is not about justice, an honest man told me, I don't care about the republic. – I'm talking about art and cities: if art and urban planning cannot provide us with affordable housing, I don't care about architecture and urban planning. And we are very far from that.

In vain we cram into these monstrous houses furniture that is more or less sumptuous and artistic: sideboards, carved chests and tables, paintings, statuettes, pianos, etc. What a fine consolation! It's fiction we indulge in.

for reality.

I would give the Louvre, the Tuileries, Notre-Dame—and the Column, too, for good measure—to live in my own little house, built to my own liking, which I would occupy alone, in the center of a small enclosure of one-tenth of a hectare, where I would have water, shade, a lawn, and silence. If I were to place a statue there, it would be neither a Jupiter nor an Apollo: I have no use for such gentlemen; nor views of London, Rome, Constantinople, or Venice:

God forbid I should ever live there! I would put in what I lack: the mountains, the vineyards, the meadows, goats, cows, sheep, harvesters, and shepherds.

How can we not see that this overflowing of works of art, of monuments of art, has no other purpose, by a terrible irony, than to perpetuate our poverty? If our education were complete, if we exercised our rights, if we lived a free life, would we need art schools and the Prix de Rome? Wouldn't this new Paris fill us with horror? We clutch our stomachs, and, lacking more tangible consumption, we gorge ourselves on spectacles!

An agglomeration of a thousand small landowners, living in their own homes, cultivating, working, and developing their own property, their industry, and their capital, governing and judging themselves—this political masterpiece, of which all others are merely accessories—this is what we have never been able to achieve.

Artists, professors and priests, academics and philosophers, all equally fail in their duty; they have become instruments of misery and depression.

The degree of degradation of the masses in a people must be measured by the exaggeration of its works of art and the importance given to its artists. It has been the secret of priesthoods and despots to deceive the impoverishment of the masses with the prestige of monuments.

Could the Egyptian complain upon seeing these obelisks, these sphinxes, these pyramids, these gigantic temples rise up?

When artistic enthusiasm seizes the Greeks, they are lost: the Romans call them nothing but Grœculi, Gréchillons, just as the Belgians call us Francequillons.

Once the empire was established, great monuments rose in Rome,

corrupt and degenerate: the Pantheon, the Colosseum, etc.

Catholicism founded its cathedrals on servitude; the Rome of Leo X paid its artists with the money from indulgences. Would to God that Luther had

exterminated the Raphaels, the Michelangelos, and all their

imitators, all those ornamenters of palaces and churches!

Once the goal of art was missed, artists became the natural auxiliaries of the priesthood and despotism against the freedom of the people. Ministers of corruption, professors of pleasure, agents of prostitution, they are the ones who have taught the masses to bear their indignity and poverty through the contemplation of their marvels.

And we exalt these artists as the foremost of mortals! We deify them! We take them as leaders and models, we give them accountability for all civic and human virtues! As long as they flatter us, amuse us, tickle us, as long as they make us pose, we are content!… With them, we have found the secret of living in superb beggary.

We have had the republicans of form; We now have the moralists of the ideal; and we have discovered this secret: that the debauchery of the mind and the shamelessness of the senses is freedom.

We saturate ourselves with novels, spectacles, parades, exhibitions, fireworks; we seek falsehood and all its glories. GLORY: that is our daily bread, the daily bread of cowardly, vain races, who, after shining for a moment in the front rank, become the laughingstock of nations.

21The history of Paris was written in the ancient names of its streets and squares. These names, in themselves,

were truthful, sincere, impartial; betraying neither pride nor chauvinism; not lying. If some accessory were added to them, it did not alter the previous testimonies in any way: it merely added its own. The triumphal arch of Louis XIV was named the Porte Saint-Denis. The monument spoke for itself; no one ever thought of renaming the Rue Saint-Denis Rue Louis XIV, or Rue de Strasbourg, or Rue de Flandre. It would be a travesty of history to change the names of the Rue d'Enfer, Rue de Vaugirard, Rue Mouffetard, Rue Saint-Jacques, Rue Laharpe, Rue des Prouvaires, and so many others that have been respected until now.

CHAPTER XXIV

Artistic Customs – Simple Advice

Artists and writers, joined by a few devout individuals and philosophers, form a separate caste, an undisciplined and servile caste, corrupt and corrupting, which, without much effort and acting slowly, has done much harm and little good throughout history. They are worshippers of form, idealists in all things.

1. In religion, they disdain dogma and the practices of worship, which they leave to the common people, and value only contemplation and union with God.

2. In politics, they despise principles, law, definitions, legal procedures, and the balance of power, preferring the inspiration of the masses and fraternity; they disdain constitutions and the form of government; everything is the same to them.

3. In social economics, they follow the maxims of philanthropy and charity, rather than those of law and science.

4. In justice, they prefer equity to law: it is a pretext for arbitrariness; fraternity and community are their ideal.

5. In morality, they favor free morals: a good heart absolves everything; in their dissolute lives, they believe themselves to be the most independent: they are the most servile of men.

6. In literature, they are enemies of genres and rules.

7. In painting, we know them.

The qualities and defects of artists are naturally deduced from the faculty they employ and the passion they serve. They form a class apart, imperious in their ideals, but inferior in reason and morality. They have very high pretensions to genius and glory. Distinguished, elegant, sensual,

greedy, capricious, vain, eager for praise and rewards, they

They belong to those who flatter and pay them, and are more often agents of corruption than of regeneration. They have never been able to find their own path; it is revolutions that show it to them, as we have observed among the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Dutch.

On the one hand, artists dabble in everything, because everything is indifferent to them; on the other, they specialize endlessly. Left to their own devices, without a guiding light, without a compass, obeying a poorly applied law of industry, they classify themselves into genres and types, first according to the nature of the commissions, then according to the means that distinguish them. Thus there are church painters, history painters, battle painters, genre painters—that is, painters of anecdotes or farces—portrait painters, landscape painters, animal painters, marine painters, Venus painters, and fantasy painters. One cultivates the nude, another drapery. Then each strives to distinguish himself by one of the means that contribute to the execution. One applies himself to drawing, another to color; one takes care with composition, another with perspective, another with costume or local color; one shines with feeling, another with the ideality or realism of his figures; yet another redeems the vacuity of the subject with the refinement of detail. Everyone strives to have a certain flair, a certain chic, a certain style, and, with the help of fashion, reputations are made and broken. One cause of success in religious painting, for several years now, has been, for example, to depict the patriarchs and figures of the Old Testament in Arab dress: Abraham is an old Bedouin.

Writers proceed no differently. One cultivates antithesis, another simile and metaphor; this one loves descriptions and pomp; that one seeks periphrasis and epithet; there are those who speak only in exclamations, apostrophes, and prosopopoeia. Pindarism, finally, phraseology, constitutes for some authors the entire art of writing. – Louis-Philippe said of Mr. Villemain that he began by composing his sentence, and then he sought out what idea he would put into it. – With this formula, they address everything: politics, philosophy, history. For thirty years, we've seen them deceive the public and stifle common sense with their usurped reputation.

These childish tricks, these gimmicks, prove that artists and writers, today more than ever, don't know where they're going.

The artist lives in isolation, his thought is solitary; he receives no help; no warmth, no light comes to him from the outside; he has neither faith nor principles; he is delivered over to the atheism of his feelings and the anarchy of his ideas. He doesn't know how to reach the public; it's a free-for-all where no one knows each other and where everyone pulls from

On his side. All solidarity is broken.

How could they produce popular works, they who know nothing of the soul of the people? How could they please educated people, they who lack serious studies and treat art with hatred and derision of science? See them battering their sides, striking their foreheads, seeking inspiration from coffee, from late nights, from all artificial stimuli, an inspiration that eludes them; succumbing to boredom, to disgust, before even beginning to work, and rhyming in spite of Minerva!… undertaking, without faith, religious paintings; Without principles, monarchical, socialist, or republican subjects, unaware that when convictions die, art dies, and that to revive it, one must reinvent oneself!… Everything here is interconnected: false art, bad literature, chauvinistic politics, immorality, venal criticism, false eloquence, absurd poetry, rhetorical history, quietist morality, and the denial of justice. Plato was right when he banished artists and poets from the republic: I do not ask that they be excluded from society, but from the government; for if the artist, at his best, is guided and inspired by society, society, on the other hand, is lost if, in the end, it allows itself to be inspired and led by him. And that is precisely our case.

Since 1789, we have worshipped fantasy; we are at the mercy of dilettantes. Mirabeau is more admired as a virtuoso than as a politician: in this, he has been made into a prodigious man of whom we are not yet worthy; Robespierre is the virtuoso of the club; Napoleon I the virtuoso of battles, crushed in the end everywhere, for lack of having had a single idea. We no longer even have a sense of our history.

Of all the agents of our intellectual and moral dissolution, the most energetic has undoubtedly been Romanticism. The school understood neither its century nor its mission; even when it sought popularity, it went astray. It distorted the taste of the masses, corrupted them, and made them in its own image. Romanticism was

idealism taken to extremes, pastiche, wild and nameless fantasy, ultimately corruption. Taste, style, language, criticism, ideas, and morals—everything is depraved. It was neither the Empire nor Louis-Philippe who made us what we are: it was Epicurean, idealistic, immoral Romanticism. Under the pretext of doing better than good, truer than truth, more just than law, it has lost our conscience. The morality of the Romantics, revived from the Jesuits, is like pure art: it is the negation of the rules of justice, of the prescriptions of law and duty; it is charity put

Above the law; it is brotherhood violating liberty and responsibility; it is love erasing the greatest villainies, a good deed redeeming a million crimes.

Sultan Murad (Legend of the Ages, by Victor Hugo) horrified the world with his atrocities. He had his eight brothers strangled, his father's twenty wives drowned; he disemboweled twelve children alive for a stolen apple; he had twenty thousand prisoners walled up alive; he annihilated cities, exterminated provinces;

He wrought such carnage with his scimitar, that his horse seemed to the world a panther.

Then one day, in Baghdad, he saw a lecherous pig with its throat cut, struggling against death. The mosquitoes and the midday sun tortured the pig and made its agony terrible. Mourad, with his foot, pushes it back into the shade,

And with that same enormous, superhuman gesture, With which he drove out kings, Mourad drove out flies.

That very evening he is struck by a fever and dies. He arrives before the sovereign judge. From all sides rises the cry of the condemned: – Justice! O living God! – But the pig cries out in turn: – Mercy! He has saved me. – And God concludes with this dreadful profession of faith: It suffices, to save even the most unkind man, Even the bloodiest of executioners and masters, With the least kindness shown to the lowliest of beings.

A single moment of love reopens the closed Eden; A rescued pig weighs down an oppressed world.

Morality of high-ranking scoundrels and powerful lords; A moral lesson for the executioners of humankind and the great cannibals of

whom Scripture speaks! Was I wrong to say that the first act of the social revolution should be to throw all Romantic literature into the fire?

Emerging from such decay, it is not enough to purify ourselves; we must remake ourselves entirely… Art flourishes in times of religious institution, moral reform,

political or philosophical revolution. This is easy to understand: art itself is the expression of reforms, all of which can be summed up in one word: the production of justice, the creation of humanity. Thus, the Renaissance and the Reformation, conspiring together, had as their counterpart an artistic and literary explosion throughout Europe; thus, the philosophical revolution of Descartes and Kant brought about the literary reform in France and Germany. The same conditions that produce great thinkers and great writers will give us great artists, and the school of the future, once established, will never falter. The artist, like the writer, must be of his time: only under this condition will his works pass into posterity; – he must be of his country22: only then will he be humanitarian; – he must be of his religion (opinion), if he is determined to be truthful and admired by philosophers; – He must be concrete in his idea: only in this way will he have an ideal.

In literature, we must return to a frank, clear, lively, simple, precise style, restrained in figures of speech, restrained in color, devoid of verbiage, unnecessary pomp, charlatanesque magnificence, and venal luxury; to an analytical, demonstrative, and quintessentially French style, an enemy of rhetoric, hyperbole, and antitheses.

The artist, like the writer, is a synthetic creator who must treat all aspects of art with equal success; and far from abandoning himself to the one in which he excels, he must constantly strive to maintain his own equilibrium, unless he works collectively, under a single direction. In this case, the union of equally superior faculties can become a means of perfection for works of art; but this will always be to the detriment of the artist serving.

Furthermore, we do not prevent each individual, joining forces with their neighbor for a common work, from working according to their abilities; what we ask is that equality be respected in all aspects of a work. It is a flawed representation to give superiority to either

drawing or color. What matters here is therefore: 1) that a work not be flawed; 2) that a new, shared vision emerges, one that sustains genius, develops and creates a tradition, and multiplies masterpieces without any further decline. Artists, if they work alone, must develop all their faculties equally within themselves, or complement them by collaborating.

Furthermore, through meditation on principles and rules, through their observation, through the study of subjects, through the new spirit with which they must be permeated, a thought, a shared genius, a tradition, a faith, a potentiality must be formed among them, elevating the talent of each above

what he would be like in solitude.

The ancient Greco-Roman world was, at one time, populated with statues. In some cities, there were as many as citizens, and almost all were masterpieces. What seems extraordinary to us today resulted from the communion of artists, from the criteria they faithfully followed.

The artist must be in communion of ideas and principles not only with his colleagues, but with all his contemporaries; he must also be imbued with the thought that there is no difference between artistic creation and industrial creation. The artist, in fact, produces nothing from nothing; he merely grasps relationships, analyzes figures, combines features, and represents them: this is what constitutes his creation.

Now, just as the industrious person, or the scholar, or the philosopher—the more they observe, the more they discover—and the more they have discovered, the better they apply and produce; —so too the artist, the better they have seen, the better they are able to represent: inspiration in them is proportional to observation. This is why, in the true artist, as in the true writer, in the philosopher, inspiration, it can be said, never falters; it is constant, it is at command. It only departs when they abandon study; when, through presumption or laziness, they produce nothing but the abundance of their speculations or memories. He who has an empty intellect also has an empty imagination.[23] But this term "creation," common to the industrious, the philosopher,

to the writer and the artist, acquires a far higher meaning if we

consider it from the point of view of society and morality.

Humanity, such is the modern, revolutionary belief, possesses justice in its essence, and it develops this content of its conscience through its own energy. It is thus its own educator; it is humanity that effects its justification,

or, in other words, its creation, just as Spinoza's absolute being does; and through the reciprocal influence of the moral and the physical in humankind, we can say that this creation of ourselves, begun in consciousness, ends up embracing the body. The artist is one of the principal agents of this creation; he senses it, divines it, provokes it, anticipates it; He is all the more creative because he has better understood the depths of the universal soul, and because he has best revealed it through his works.

Let the bohemians and the Academy be scandalized by my proposals; upright minds will understand the great idea of my book: to reconcile art with what is just and useful. Until now, in fact, art remained in a mystical, transcendental sphere; artists formed a world apart, outside of human life, outside of practical reason, business, and customs.

was indignant at the mere thought of a purpose, an end, any utility whatsoever in art. Those who devoted themselves to it seemed to be of a different kind than ordinary mortals, whose laws did not seem to apply to them; they had their own customs apart. Thus, while people of art and letters despised the world of the industrious, the bourgeois, and others, they were in turn despised by them: the title of artist had almost become a title of disdain, of disrepute.

All that is over now. An artist will henceforth be a citizen, a man like any other; he will follow the same rules, obey the same principles, respect the same conventions, speak the same language, exercise the same rights, fulfill the same duties. Judged by men who are not of his profession, he will nonetheless be judged by his peers; If he no longer encounters idolatry, if excessive honors no longer come his way, he will also not experience ostracism, and will feel at home. Like the actor and the singer, the artist must above all be an honest man, all the more honest the more of an artist he is.

22A question arises from this: is it good for the artist to travel constantly? I don't think so; he is not meant

to make man universal, nor the landscape or Eden universal; he was made to express an idea, a form, which is generally that of his country and his contemporaries. Courbet is indeed the painter of Ornans, of the Ornans landscape, of the peasants of Flagey. This is what gives him his strength. It is also through this that he is the merciless mocker of the bourgeoisie of his time and of Parisian manners.

23How could it have been overlooked that reflective, highly expressive, analytical, synthetic,

critical art necessarily implies a superior freedom? How could study and meditation have been seen as the death of art? The artists who most honor our era—Delacroix, Corot, Huguenin, Barye—are all men of profound observation, of long study, of patient research. Courbet, whose spontaneity is so rich, whose independence so fiery, meditates long on his works; he contemplates them in his imagination, and suddenly he produces them, with fervor, in a few days.

CHAPTER XXV

Conclusion

From all that has been said above, from this brief overview of the different characteristics of art among the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Christians of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Dutch Reformers; and finally from the examination of the works of contemporary painters and some paintings by Courbet, there emerges, for us, the public, a set of notions, principles, and rules that we can consider the most complete theory of art.

We have enough to compare, judge, and classify; enough to motivate our preferences, impose our ideas, chart a course, indicate a goal, and mark the condition of our votes.

Every creation of art, like that of industry or politics, necessarily has a purpose; it is made for a goal. It is absurd to suppose that something happens in society—why not say in the universe? – for the sole purpose of its own creation.

This undeniable principle being established, only two alternatives remain for art:

Either painting, in all its works, the most serious as well as the most lighthearted, the most learned and the most whimsical, will have the effect of expressing human life, representing its feelings, passions, virtues and vices, labors, prejudices, absurdities, enthusiasms, grandeur and shame, all customs, good or bad, in short, its forms, according to their typical manifestations, individual and collective, and all with a view to the physical, intellectual, and moral improvement of humanity, to its self-justification, and ultimately to its glorification.

Or, under the pretext of freedom, artistic independence, genius, ideals, revelation, inspiration, reverie, and fantasy, it will place itself at the service of either religious idealism, illuminism, fanaticism, and quietism; or

Idleness, luxury and pleasure, or Epicureanism: which means that, by refusing a highly moral, practical, and positive mission, the school of art for art's sake will adopt a perfectly irrational, chimerical,

and immoral one.

This is inevitable, and the facts prove it.

From this fundamental definition of art and its purpose, it follows:

1. That in every work of art, one must consider first the very idea of the work, its practical purpose, and secondly the execution: the EFFECTS before the means; the CONTENT before the container; the THOUGHT before its realization;

2. That the artist's idea must always be logical, rational, and true, and that in this respect, the work falls under philosophical criticism; but that one cannot judge in the same way, with equal certainty, the presentation of the idea, because *de gustibus et coloribus non disputandum*;

3. That a work of art is therefore composed of IDEA and representation, the former rational, the latter depending on the taste and means of the artist; the former demonstrable, the latter not;

4. But that in any case, there is this in favor of the idea: that while not everything that is reasonable is necessarily good in representation, nothing truly beautiful can be irrational.

Such are the principles of art and of the new criticism: principles that I declare common to literature, poetry, architecture, music, even dance, as well as to painting and sculpture, and which govern everything here.

Since the painter and sculptor aim to represent humanity with the goal of improvement, the question immediately arises as to the means to employ for this representation.

Among these means, we first distinguish two things: – imitable and representable reality, a reality almost always more or less flawed; – imagination, which, at will, straightens, corrects, and embellishes reality, or makes it grimace, uglify, and distort it.

The real and the ideal alternately contribute, in varying proportions, according to the artist's wishes and the desired effect; they are part of the means, that is to say, of the execution, not of the effects, not of the goal. Thus, in painting, color and drawing contribute to the work and are part of the means; it is absurd to imagine a painting made entirely of color or entirely of lines;

It's even more absurd to make a painter's specialty based on their ability to color or draw.

People complain, and rightly so, about the detestable criticism of today. It's

The scourge of artists, whom it discourages and murders, when it should enlighten them;

a true profession of blackmail and injustice. Thanks to this unprincipled criticism, for whom the idea is nothing, the style and flair everything, the public has come to no longer care about the compositions, which it understands all the less because the artists themselves do not understand each other. We stop at the portrait and the landscape; beyond that, nothingness. Thus, no one concerns themselves with the idea anymore: in the museum, as in the opera theater, words and drama are disregarded; to listen only to the instruments and voices. We leave aside the EFFECTS to concern ourselves only with the means. On which everyone pronounces themselves an expert; as for the substance, we know nothing, for the excellent reason that in the mess, there is nothing to know. We toil for one, we demand another, and art dies in this cacophony.

The final, and most deplorable, consequence of art in flux, of formless thought and blind, brutal criticism: society separates itself from art; it removes it from real life; it makes it a means of pleasure and amusement, a pastime, but one to which it has no attachment; it is superfluous, luxury, vanity, debauchery, illusion; it is whatever you want to call it. It is no longer a faculty or a function, a form of life, an integral and constitutive part of existence.

As for us revolutionary socialists, we say to artists as well as to writers: Our ideal is right and truth. If you cannot make art and style with that, then back off! We have no need of you. If you serve the corrupt, the luxurious, the lazy, get out! We want nothing to do with your arts.

If aristocracy, the pontificate, and royal majesty are indispensable to you, get out again! We proscribe your art as well as your persons. The future is splendid before us.

We have to build 36,000 communal houses, as many schools, meeting rooms, workshops, factories, our gymnasiums, our train stations, our warehouses, our stores, our market halls, our libraries.

We have to create 40,000 libraries of 6,000 volumes each—240 million volumes—observatories, physics laboratories, chemistry laboratories, anatomy lecture halls, museums, and thousands of belvederes.

We must discover the housing models of the peasant and the worker, of the city dweller and the countryman; our towns and villages to be rebuilt;

and, first and foremost, Haussmann's Paris.

We have France to transform into a vast garden interspersed with groves, coppices, tall trees, springs, streams, and rocks, where each landscape contributes to the overall harmony.

One day, the wonders predicted by Fourier will be realized.

The true monuments of the Republic, unlike those of the Empire, will lie in the comfort, healthfulness, and affordability of housing.

But, above all, we have one last battle to wage against bad taste, false literature, immorality, and the policy of absorption.

We must educate the people, instill in them, along with a taste for science, an understanding of history and philosophy, a devotion to justice, and the true joys of work and society.

We must teach law, liberty, mutual aid, and the theory of contracts. We must eradicate empty rhetoric, charlatanism, chauvinism, and corruption.

We must re-educate women and instill in them the following truths:

- Order and cleanliness in the home are worth more than a drawing room adorned with masterpieces. - A woman who knows how to dress with taste, cleanliness, and decency, without luxury, is an artist; one who only knows how to adorn herself with jewels and lace, who wears her dowry on her body, is a vulgar woman, devoid

of any sense of taste or art: no matter what she does, nothing redeems her; the more opulent she appears, the more repulsive she is. - Woman is an artist; that is precisely why the functions of the household have been assigned to her. Does anyone imagine by chance that she will spend her time painting watercolors or pastels?

First and foremost, we ourselves must reform our lives, seek work, practice modesty and sobriety, and follow Pythagorean principles. The table is ruinous: so much the better! We will still have, along with the art of eating properly, sobriety.

We must renounce our bohemian habits, pursue lengthy studies, immerse ourselves for ten to fifteen years in mechanical work, in business, before we begin to speak to the public; safeguard our reason through our labors, produce late, and only devote ourselves fully to literature, philosophy, or the arts after the age of forty or forty-five.

Under these conditions, we will see the return of the great centuries; we will in turn be original; we will be definitively emancipated and free; humanity will be able to proclaim its maturity; it will be free; and this long transition, marked by the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the French Revolution, will be over. The regeneration will be accomplished, and we will be able to apply to the new spirit what

It has been said of the ancient spirit or Holy Spirit: Et renovabis faciem terra

END